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BANGLADESH SPECIAL

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India-Bangladesh Bilateral Trade: Issues and Concerns

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Editor's Page

Bordered by India on its west, north and east, Myanmar on the east and by the Bay of Bengal in the south, Bangladesh with over 140 million people is the most densely populated country. Having achieved its independence in December 1971, Bangladesh has been confronted with the problems of high population growth rate, poverty, floods and cyclones, which have been adversely affecting its economic development. Notwithstanding these problems, Bangladesh has registered economic growth of about 5 per cent, which is sustained by liberal foreign assistance, exports particularly of readymade garments and remittances from Bangladeshis working abroad. Though majority of its population (about 88 per cent) are Muslims, there are other communities such as Hindus (10.5 per cent), Buddhists, Christians and others (about 1.5 per cent).

Independent Bangladesh emerged in December 1971 on the strength of Bengali nationalism and as a secular country. However, after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman in 1975, Bengali nationalism of the pre and post-liberation period was replaced by Bangladeshi nationalism. Now, the secular principle of the constitution of 1972 was dropped and the Islamic orientation of the polity became pronounced. The political-bureaucratic-military elite started using Islam to legitimize their leadership. Bangladesh now sought to emphasise its links with the Islamic *Ummah* and stressed the need to maintain special relations with the Islamic countries. This shift in its foreign policy brought Bangladesh certain economic benefits in terms of liberal assistance by the West Asian countries and consequent easing of pressure on its oil import bill. The country witnessed the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism, as *Jamaat-e-Islami* and other Islamic outfits such as *Islamic Chatro Shibir* and *Islami Oikyo Jote* consolidated and expanded their institutional network fully utilizing the Islamic petro dollars. Of late, the existence of Islamist militant underground groups such as *Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami* (HUJI), *Hizbul Mujahideen*, *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, *Jaish-e-Mohammad* in Bangladesh and their

continued anti-India activities, has been a major security threat to India. Whereas the Islamic fundamentalist outfit *Shahadat-e-al-Hakima* which advocates the occupation of West Bengal by Bangladesh, has been banned by Bangladesh in February 2003, it needs to initiate similar action against such other organizations operating against India from Bangladeshi soil. Given Bangladesh's commitment to the global campaign against terrorism, it would be in Dhaka's interest to curb the rise of Islamist extremism and terrorism. Bangladesh should continue to be seen as a moderate, pluralistic society committed to regional peace, democratic values and practices.

Sharing a common land border of over 4,100 kms. Both Bangladesh and India are bound by age old traditions, culture and history. Notwithstanding the significant role played by India in the liberation of Bangladesh, relations between the two countries have been beset with several irritants. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and existence of Islamist militant groups in Bangladesh, illegal migration of millions of Bangladeshis into India, Bangladesh's reservation to export its gas to India, Dhaka's refusal to provide transit access for India's north-east, undermarked border tract of about 6 kms., existence of enclaves in each other's country and water sharing are the main issues that need to be addressed.

Illegal immigration of over 15 million Bangladeshi nationals to India has changed the demographic profile of some north-eastern states of India, besides increasingly pressure on land and resources causing social tension. Bangladesh's failure to cooperate with India in the repatriation of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants has complicated the problem. It is high time that India takes requisite steps for effective border control, registration of foreigners and their removal from voter lists, issue of photo-identity cards particularly in the states bordering Bangladesh. International agencies like ICRC and UNHCR which have achieved some success in the repatriation of refugees/migrants from Afghanistan and Tajikistan, can be coopted to facilitate the repatriation of Bangladeshi nationals from India to their home country.

Indian official trade with Bangladesh is over 1 billion US dollars, with Indian exports of over 900 million US dollars. To this should be added the 2 billion US dollars worth of exports through informal channels. The existing imbalance in bilateral trade can be set right if Bangladesh accepts the Indian offer of Free Trade Agreement (FTA). It will help the two countries to move away from a commodity-by-commodity approach to freeing trade and will pave way for increased investments, setting up of joint ventures, transshipment/transit, harmonization of customs procedures etc. The experience of India's trade agreement with Sri Lanka shows that latter's exports to India increased by 137 per cent in 2002 as compared to an increase of 48 per cent in Indian exports to Sri Lanka. Indian investments in Sri Lanka have also crossed 650 million US dollars, after the implementation of the FTA. As regards the transit facility to India's northeastern states through Bangladesh, it was in operation before the independence of Bangladesh. Though this matter was agreed to by Bangladesh and even included in the bilateral trade agreement signed in March 1972 and later in 1980, land transit facility has been denied to India. BIMSTEC (Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand-Economic Cooperation) offers an opportunity to both India and Bangladesh to collaborate in various sectors including transport, tourism, investment etc.

With its proven natural gas reserves of about 23 trillion cubic feet (cft) and potential reserves of 60 trillion cft, Bangladesh can utilize its huge economic potential. As most of the gas fields are located in the north and eastern part of Bangladesh in close proximity to India, the export of surplus gas to India makes the best economic sense. Besides, India and Bangladesh can mutually benefit from collaborative ventures in exploration, transportation, industrial and commercial usage of Bangladesh gas. This will not only alter the balance of trade with India in favour of Bangladesh, but will also spur the growth of industry and Indian investments in Bangladesh, leading to overall development of that country.

K. Warikoo

REGIMES, POWER STRUCTURE AND POLICIES IN BANGLADESH

Redwanur Rahman

Following independence of Bangladesh in 1971, various changes have occurred in the socio-economic and political fields. The country has experienced various political regimes. These regimes emerged with diverse power base, strategies and policies. The changing nature of political economy shaped the nature of dominance and its policies. The tenure of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib) was marked for civilian supremacy in the political arena and ‘nationalization’ and ‘state capitalism’ in economic arena, Ziaur Rahman’s (Zia) as civil-military domination in politics and disinvestment in the economic field. H.M. Ershad’s (Ershad) was a military dominated government marked by denationalization and privatization in the economic arena. Begum Khaleda Zia (Khaleda) headed a civilian dominated government and propagated economic liberalism while Sheikh Hasina Wajed (Hasina) had similar government as of Begum Zia and followed the policy of economic liberalism. Each government had its distinct characters in political, power structure and policy aspects.

THE MUJIB REGIME (1972-75)

Bangladesh became independent under the leadership *Awami League* (AL) with its leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib). Though Bangladesh started with fragile political and economic systems but within a short span of time, *Awami League* (AL) government was able to establish its authority and built political and economic institutions.¹ The state formulated a new constitution within nine months of independence and national election in 1973. The government established different national political institutions including cabinet, parliament, judiciary, election commission and planning commission. The people had high expectations for jobs, education, health care, necessary

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essential services and commodities with affordable prices and improved law and order situation with good governance. But the government could not fulfil the demands due to the devastating economy, lack of resources, widespread corruption, inefficient administrative services, lack of committed manpower and political will. This volatile situation had shaken Mujib government in 1975. Mujib's personal as well as his party's (AL) popularity had decreased in an alarming rate. The radical political parties challenged government authority; people in general and most of the freedom fighters in particular were frustrated with government activities and policies. The acute economic crisis, growing political opposition and administrative mismanagement and inefficiency engendered a feeling of insecurity among the political leadership of AL which had helped to decide to form one party presidential system in the middle of 1975.² The government had moved from democracy to authoritarian rule within three and a half years of its rule.

Power Structure

The state recognized supremacy of political elites and they were given higher positions in the different tiers of the state structure. These elites comprised of rich farmers, traders and small industrialists, professionals and intellectuals and lower echelons of the civil service.³ The government also took necessary steps to subordinate civil bureaucracy and the military to retain political control.⁴ Sheikh Mujib had kept major decision-making authority with himself including decisions concerned to cabinet, Parliament, Planning Commission and public sector Corporations. He was aided by his secretariat where important posts were occupied by non-bureaucrats and highly political men.⁵ In addition to his secretariat, he was aided by his cabinet, comprising of 23 members of whom 13 were lawyers, four businessmen, four politicians, one college teacher, one landlord and one ex-army personnel.⁶

During the *Awami League* regime, Members of Parliament (MP) had a key role in decision-making process. The socio-economic background of MPs demonstrates that they had better education,

income, family background and were involved in various professional activities. There were 26.6 per cent lawyers, 23.7 per cent businessmen, 17.6 per cent surplus farmers, 15.2 per cent professionals and 12.7 per cent politicians. Seventy per cent had completed college and university education and 27.3 per cent had post-graduation degree. 32.2 per cent had income less than TK⁷. 20,000 annually, 32 per cent had less than TK. 30,000, 25 per cent had less than TK. 50,000 and rest had above TK. 50,000.⁸

The planning commission also was a key decision-making body, which had emerged with a new shape. It was given the key responsibility of plan making and formulating policies for the implementation of the plans.⁹ Most of the key positions were given to the members of the university faculties¹⁰ who were closest to the AL.¹¹ A few held key positions in the public sector corporations, enjoying a dominant role in decision-making and had good relations with AL. Of the 44 chief executives, 35 were political personnel with professional or managerial background, five civil bureaucrats, and four military bureaucrats.¹² Even in BAKSAL¹³, 15 members Executives Committee and 115 members Central Committee were dominated by the politicians, only 21 were from other professions.

The AL regime took necessary steps to control the civil-military bureaucracy. The constitutional and reformative measures were adopted to curtail the power and privileges of bureaucracy, which they enjoyed during the last 24 years of Pakistani rule. Out of 180 Bengali Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), 53 were fired from the job. Defence expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure was curtailed from 56 per cent in Pakistani days to seven per cent in 1974-75.¹⁴ The regime was reluctant to establish a well-equipped military.

Thus, it is clear that in every sphere of state power there was civilian domination with democratic practices but after three and a half years, the state power structure turned to one party authoritarian rule. The dominant pattern of these groups in the state apparatus had got reflected in the policy mechanisms.

Economic Policy

The Mujib government had taken different steps, both institutional and organizational, to give a new direction to various sectors of economy. The strategy followed 'command economy'. But the state did not follow very strict principles of socialism because there were wide spectrums of political and economic ideologies embraced within the ruling party. So during the AL rule, there were diverse policy dimensions in the economic sector.

The state adopted 'inward looking'¹⁵ economic policies, where the public sector played the leading role. This provided the base of the industrial policy, which helped to nationalize a total of 725 industrial units with 92 per cent of the total industrial fixed assets, compared to 53 units and 34 per cent of the fixed assets, held by the state in 1960-70.¹⁶ Ten Corporations were established to manage and control the nationalized enterprises. The nationalization policy limited the flourishing of the private sector. Private sector investment per unit was allowed with fixed assets of up to TK. 2.5 million. These units allowed reinvesting of profits up to TK.3.5 million. Besides, the private sector, investments were not exclusively their preserve; the government had the right to nationalize. The new units however, were guaranteed against nationalization for a period of ten years. So by controlling all activities in the economic sphere, Mujib government was able to maintain 'command economy'. The government allowed private and foreign investments only with public sector collaboration and minority equity participation. The private sector was allowed a five year tax holiday and a 60 per cent exemption from taxes on the money reinvested in the industry or in government bonds.¹⁷ Later on, the investment limit was raised up to TK. 30 million. Permission to bridge partnerships between domestic and foreign capital was allowed. The private capital was open to invest in the economy except eighteen sectors which were kept exclusively for the public sector development.¹⁸ Prior permission was needed before investment in the private sector. The moratorium on nationalization was also extended from ten to fifteen years and fair and equitable compensation was guaranteed.¹⁹ For the promotion of

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small industry, the government had established Bangladesh Small Industries Corporation and provided all type of financial and technical assistance to the small entrepreneur.

Agricultural Policy

In the field of agriculture, the state made legislation to control the land-holding sizes. Each family was allowed to retain a maximum of 100 *bighas*²⁰ of land; families who had less than 25 *bighas* were exempted from land revenue. But the holders had to pay development tax, relief tax and others. Those who had more than 25 *bighas* were asked to submit their accounts of land and the provision of fine was enacted for those who failed to submit land accounts. Those who held more than 100 *bighas* were asked to surrender excess land to the government. No family was allowed to hold more than 100 *bighas*. Tea, rubber, coffee, industrial and cooperative society were exempted from the land regulation.²¹ Policy provision was made to provide land to the landless families. The rights of landowners to their diluvial land were taken away and the state was made the sole disburser of these lands.²² A Consumer Supplies Corporation was established to procure food grains from the surplus-producing farmers and from surplus producing areas and then distributed to the landless peasants and in the deficit areas.²³ In order to mobilize savings and ensure redistribution of incomes, rural cooperatives were also established.²⁴ The state provided huge subsidies on the agricultural inputs.

Trade Policy

The state played a dominant role in trade and business sectors. The state controlled about 90 per cent of both domestic and foreign trades. A Trading Corporation of Bangladesh was established to control the import business. The private sector played a dominant role in domestic trade. Public sector manufactures and imports were marketed by private dealers and retailers²⁵ though imports were controlled by the government through imposing high tariffs. From 1972-76, Bangladesh had imported goods valued US\$ 3,383 million and exported only US\$1,439.8 million.²⁶ Foreign exchanges were strictly controlled by the state.

Economic Indicators

During Mujib's regime, the state was promised US\$ 4,267 million foreign assistance but only US\$ 2,984 million was disbursed. Nearly 52 per cent was grants.²⁷ The agricultural and industrial output were 94 per cent and 87 per cent respectively, below the benchmark level of 1969-70.²⁸ The average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate was 5.1 per cent between 1973 and 1975 periods. The prices of essential commodities had increased by 300 per cent in 1973 and by 700-800 per cent in 1974.²⁹ The entire economy was functioning at a rate well below the rate of the pre-liberation period.³⁰ The per capita real income was TK.635 (in 1973 price). Average GDP was TK. 79,423 in current price. Gross domestic investment, as a percentage GDP of was 6.7 per cent. Budget deficit, as percent of GDP, was 8.4. The inflation was 41.9 per cent.³¹ The regime could be regarded as a case of economic under-development because of the policies and their output mentioned above.

The discussion above reveals that the nature of dominance, politicians' group identity, and socio-economic background led to follow mixed economy. The civilian dominance in decision-making prevailed all through the period. In the later part of the regime, Mujib and his party had tried to concentrate power by establishing one party rule. The state tried to control the economy through dominant public sector activities. But the policies pursued by the leadership failed to either establish socialism or generate economic growth.

THE ZIA REGIME (1975-82)

After the assassination of Mujib and overthrow of his government in 1975, the new regime's power structure and economic policies changed significantly. The new regime emphasized establishing a free and democratic political process.³² But this regime was replaced by military government. The civil-military bureaucratic elite came to the forefront, consolidated its position, occupied important portfolios and dominated all decision-making processes.³³ After the coup and counter coup, Ziaur Rahman (Zia) emerged as a voice of authority and source

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of power;³⁴ the country was now under military rule, controlled by a civilian president. Zia regime gained popularity and sought to control essential prices, allowed multi-party system including Islamic parties and liberalized economy. Zia formed Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) under state patronage and won presidential and parliamentary elections in 1978 and 1979 respectively.

Power Structure

Zia emerged as Chief Martial Law Administrator and President in 1976 and 1977 respectively. The state power was brought under the direct control of the President. Civil-military bureaucracy started to control and dominate the decision-making process. In 1978, the President-cum-Chief Martial Law Administrator was assisted by 31 members advisory council, in which 13 were civil-military bureaucrats, and 11 technocrats, five were non-political civilians, recruited from business and other professions.³⁵ After the withdrawal of martial law, the cabinet structure remained the same, with no qualitative changes. Most important portfolios were given to the civil-military bureaucrats. The socio-demographic character of the 25 civil servants shows that 100 per cent had M.A. degree, four had M.A from foreign university, four had Ph. D degree, and 64 per cent had attended English medium schools.³⁶

It is difficult to generate data from the military bureaucracy. But other auxiliary factors indicate that they had good education, income and social background. The number of military personnel increased from 52,000 in 1975-76 to 77,000 in 1980-81, and the defence budget was increased. Some of the military personnel had completed higher training in U.K. U.S.A. and Germany. Zia regime provided better position to military bureaucrats in the civil bureaucracy. Six out of 20 secretaries, 14 out of 20 superintendents of police, 10 out of 20 top public sector corporation directors and 32 diplomatic posts were filled up by military personnel.³⁷

The National Economic Council (NEC) was revived as the highest policy-making and decision-making institution. The main body of NEC

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executive committee was comprised of five members of civil-military bureaucrats.³⁸ The planning commission consisted of eight members. Chairman and deputy Chairman were civil bureaucrats.³⁹ The civil-military bureaucrats dominated the public sector corporations of whom 11 were former CSPs, 10 military officers, two police officers, six East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCSs) officer and the rest nine belonged to other services of the former central government of Pakistan.⁴⁰ The President's secretariat and the central secretariat were hub of administration and policy-making, and they were dominated by civil-military bureaucratic elites.

Though political leaders had a low profile in the policy-making bodies, but the socio-economic and professional data of Member of Parliament indicates that 27.7 per cent were businessmen and industrialists, 23.8 per cent lawyers, 13.4 per cent agriculturists, 12.7 per cent technocrats, 12.2 per cent civil-military bureaucrats, 45 per cent had postgraduate degrees, and 32 per cent were graduates.⁴¹ Forty three per cent of them had monthly income above TK. 5,000, 23 per cent had land holdings of over 25 acres, and 60 per cent had more than 10 acres.⁴² Zia always preferred and favoured civil-military bureaucrats. Political leaders had comparatively minimum participation (40 per cent) as ministers. This created frustration among the civilian MPs who were keen to get involved in decision-making process.⁴³ It was a rule of civil-military bureaucracy.

Economic Policy

In 1975, the state followed different types of economic policies due to change in state power structure. The major thrust of economic policies was disinvestment from the public sector and encouragement to private-sector-led growth. The industrial policy, announced in December 1975, gave immense opportunity to the private sector to flourish for the first time in Bangladesh. The investment ceiling was raised from TK. 30 million to TK.100 million, and by the end of 1978 the ceiling was finally withdrawn. The Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB) was established in order to provide bridging finance

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and under writing facilities to the private sector. The Dhaka Stock Exchange was revived to reactivate and to mobilize private savings for industrial investment. Different types of incentives were also provided for industrial investment. The government financial institutions offered liberal credit facilities to the private sector industries. Nationalization was withdrawn and compensation was ensured in case of nationalization. Though high emphasis was given for private investment but it was tightly controlled and regulated by the state.⁴⁴

As a part of general economic policies, the government chalked out guidelines to hand over public sector industries to private sector. The Pakistani abandoned industries were sold by tender. The industries of Bangladeshi owners were reverted back to their original owners. As a result, in 1975-82, 362 abandoned units were sold off to the private sector.⁴⁵ The government relaxed the restrictions on foreign investments, by raising the ceiling on foreign equity participation in selected areas. An Export Processing Zone (EPZ) was established to encourage the foreign investors.

Agricultural Policy

In the field of agriculture, the government took necessary steps like liberal credit, new technology, easy access to seed, fertilizer, to help the farmers. A massive program of cannel digging was lunched. A self-sustaining movement was also lunched for rural development. But land revenue was imposed for the medium size (25 *bighas*) families. The subsidies on agricultural inputs were gradually withdrawn. The private agricultural entrepreneurs were given facilities for agricultural plantation (tea, rubber, and shrimp cultivation.⁴⁶ The monopoly over the fertilizer distribution system of Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), a public sector corporation was curtailed in favour of private marketing.

Trade Policy

Private sector was allowed a leading role in the field of trade and business. The government formulated import and export policy to

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encourage the private sector participation. Income tax was reduced and special awards were also introduced for the successful exporters. The performance licence scheme was introduced to provide more incentives to the exporters. In 1975-82, the volume of exports and imports increased to almost double compared to Mujib regime. The controlling of foreign exchange was not strictly maintained. Wage Earner's scheme was started to facilitate exchange earning.⁴⁷

Economic Indicators

During Zia regime, the state was promised US\$ 8,267 million, but only US\$ 6,012 million was disbursed of which 50 per cent was in the form of grants.⁴⁸ The overall GDP growth was 5.5 per cent. The per capita income increased from TK. 652 in 1973 to TK. 772 in 1980 at 1972-73 prices. Investment as a percentage of GDP increased from 6.70 per cent in 1972-75 to 13.45 per cent in 1975-81. The total investment increased to TK. 5,445 million in 1981 at current price. Private sector investment increased from TK. 82 million to TK. 1,200 million in the period 1973-79.⁴⁹ The price of essential commodities went down as compared to 1973-74. But the general price index increased by 628 per cent in 1980-81 at 1969-70 price level.⁵⁰ Industrial growth rate was 4.9 per cent per annum in 1975-81. Average GDP in the regime was Tk.171,047. The gross domestic savings were 2.2 per cent and the inflation was 9.5 per cent.⁵¹ The policy followed by Zia regime was impressive for the economy compared to the earlier regime. In fact, during this regime, the political economy helped to strengthen Zia regime's base, which was quite different from the earlier regime.

THE ERSHAD REGIME (1982-90)

Following the assassination of president Zia by a military coup in 1981, Justice Abdus Sattar was elected President. Justice Sattar attempted to control the military interference in political and decision-making process. But, General H.M.Ershad, the then chief of army staff, demanded a permanent role for the military in decision-making. When Justice Sattar refused, the situation got aggravated and General Ershad

seized state power in a bloodless coup in 1982. He was able to create “an authoritarian, military-bureaucratic state, dominated by an all powerful president supported by military”.⁵² His regime can be called all-powerful military oligarchy. The number of armed forces increased from 77,000 in 1982-83 to 110,000 in 1990-91.⁵³ Defence budget was enhanced from TK. 3,406 million to TK. 11450 million.⁵⁴ Military personnel were holding lucrative posts in civil administration including 28 senior posts in the Secretariat, 14 posts of Chairman or Director General in public sector corporations, and one-third of diplomatic posts. At the political level, 40 per cent of the ministerial posts were held by the military personnel.⁵⁵

The President had all executive power and Ershad remained as head of government, head of the armed forces and the chief executive. He had power to appoint or dismiss the ministers and judges. His secretariat became the most powerful organ of the government⁵⁶ and the most important posts were occupied by military personnel. Political leaders had minimal role in the decision-making process though theoretically the Council of Ministers were the highest decision-making body. Within nine years of his rule from 1982 to 1990, Council of Ministers got shaped and reshaped 63 times. The number of ministers grew from 11 in 1982 to 38 in 1989.⁵⁷ After assuming power in 1982, Ershad was aided by a Council of Members amongst whom seven were military bureaucrats, three civil-bureaucrats, two technocrats and four lawyers.⁵⁸ After the parliamentary election in 1986, the share of military bureaucrats was higher. Occupational background of the Members of Parliament shows that 48.8 per cent were attached to party politics, 16.3 per cent to military, 9.3 per cent to bureaucracy. 11.6 per cent to business and industry, seven per cent to journalist, and the rest seven per cent were technocrats.⁵⁹ The Council of Ministers was only in name but Ershad and his mini-cabinet did every thing.⁶⁰

There is no rigorous study of the parliament members during Ershad regime; but businessmen, civil-military bureaucrats were in large numbers. Even at the level of party (*Jatiya* party) structure, most of the executive members were from the civil-military bureaucracy.

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Institutional mechanisms of checks and balances had hardly any meaning or justification. His autocratic attitude and activities were reflected in every sphere of state. No decision could be taken without his consent. Ershad and his military oligarchy wielded all power and authority. The regime survived with the active support of the army and distribution of patronage until it collapsed due to mass upheaval in 1990.

Economic Policy

After assuming power Ershad had given priority to economy and development. A policy of denationalization and privatization was pursued to accelerate growth. The regime announced New Industrial Policy (NIP) in 1982 and Revised Industrial Policy (RIP) in 1986 in order to put the main thrust of economic development into action. The NIP had made significant changes in the development of the industrial sector in Bangladesh. Its major thrust was industrialization through the private sector leadership. The policy called for denationalization of the public sector units, liberalizing control over the private sector, improving efficiency and profitability in the public sector, promoting export oriented industries and encouraging efficient and economic import substitutions. It also emphasized upon a balance in the development and proliferation of industries in the country. Public sector activities were restricted to only six basic and strategic industries.⁶¹ To promote the policy objectives, different promotional and incentives measures were introduced such as relaxation in administrative procedures, monetary benefits, and credit facilities. Necessary directions were given to the nationalized commercial banks (NCBs) and development finance institutions (DFI) to restructure or to modify the terms of debt servicing.

The announcement of Revised Industrial Policy (RIP) gave another momentum to the development of industrial sector, particularly the private sector. It further extended and strengthened the promotional and incentive measures of New Industrial Policy (NIP). It emphasized on privatization by offering 49 per cent of shares in public sector enterprises to the private buyers. Fifteen per cent shares were reserved for the employees of the enterprises concerned. The 'concurrent list'⁶²

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was dropped while 'reserved list'⁶³ was increased from six to seven. A 'priority list'⁶⁴ of six categories and 'discouraged list'⁶⁵ of twelve were introduced. As a part of these policies, the government denationalized former Bangladeshi-owned jute and textile mills and privatized public sector enterprises. As a result, 609 industrial enterprises, 465 commercial business units and two Banks were divested, denationalized or privatized, of which 222 (by mid-1980s) were under NIP and RIP of this regime.⁶⁶ To accelerate foreign investment, NIP and RIP broadened the existing incentive facilities, simplified administrative procedures and identified 84 industries for foreign investment. Special zones (Export Processing Zone -EPZ)) were established to attract foreign investment.

Agricultural Policy

In the field of agriculture, law was enacted in 1984, which again give limited land ceiling up to 60 *bighas* (20 acres) per family. A person or family acquiring more than the ceiling permits got compensation for the excess land surrendered to the government. It gave protection to the rural household in the course of possible eviction due to the non-payment of rent or tax. This law gave due rights to the sharecroppers. It provided for a share contract for five years and ensured two-thirds shares for the sharecropper if he arranged his own seed and fertilizer. If the seed and the fertilizer are supplied by the landowner, then owner would share the two-thirds.⁶⁷ The Ershad government also introduced a graduated land tax system in 1983.⁶⁸

Trade Policy

Private sector was asked to play a pivotal role in trade and business. Government machinery was entrusted to provide maximum acceleration to the private sector. Import and export systems were liberalized. Imports could be carried out through a "letter of credit". To encourage exports, export performance benefit, duty draw back, subsidised export finance, income tax rebate on insurance premiums, and bonded warehouse system were offered to investors.⁶⁹ The volume of both export and import had increased. As regards exports,

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their volume was US\$ 686 million in 1982-83 which increased to US\$ 1,524 million in 1990. The import was of US\$ 2309 million, which increased to US\$ 3,759 million in the same period respectively.⁷⁰ The regime had devalued the Taka several times in response to the internal and external pressures. The nominal exchange rate was depreciated, and dual exchange rate prevailed. So the state control was limited.

Economic Indicators

During Ershad regime, the state was promised US\$15,408 million but was disbursed US\$ 13,465 million, of which 47 per cent was grants.⁷¹ The average GDP growth rate was 3.7 and GDP was TK.5,42,175 between 1982 and 1990.⁷² The economy was known for low saving rate, poor domestic resource mobilization and low rate of export growth.⁷³ There was a fiscal deficit of 58,100 million and 9.33 per cent inflation in 1989-90 fiscal year. The macro-economic performances in 1980s were discouraging.⁷⁴ Market oriented environment was developed which had relaxed the state control. The total economic structure was not impressive and performance remained sluggish. This regime introduced structural adjustment policies which badly affected economic performance.

The state under Ershad was dominated by military-bureaucrats, who controlled the major decision making process. In the economy, denationalization and privatization along with the leading role of the private sector remained the main thrusts of the regime. The political economy of the regime had shaped the policy outline and its performance outcomes.

THE BEGUM KHALEDA ZIA REGIME (1991-96)

After nine years of autocratic rule of General Ershad, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Khaleda Zia, wife of General Zia, swept to power through the elections in 1991. A new leadership emerged, hence the decision-making process also changed. The structure of government also changed. Following the re-introduction of parliamentary system, the Prime Minister became the chief executive

power in the government. Begum Khaleda Zia was a powerful Prime Minister. It was known as “prime ministerial government” rather than cabinet government. Begum Zia usually took decisions in consultation with senior cabinet members.⁷⁵ She was assisted by a group of forty ministers as formed in September 1991. Among them, 45 per cent were businessmen-industrialists, 20 percent lawyers, two per cent landlords, 13 percent university and college teachers, five percent ex-civil servants and two percent full time politicians.⁷⁶ Important ministries were given to those who had previous experience of governance. The army and businessmen had good representations as compared to the previous regimes’ cabinets. These two classes have been emerging as a dominant force in the Bangladesh society. BNP constituency had strong support bases of the business community, the army and the civil bureaucrats.

After the 1991 election, the parliamentarians regained power. They were able to control and regulate the government’s decision making process. The professional background of Members of Parliament (MPs) indicates that businessmen and industrialists comprised 53 per cent, and six per cent were ex-army officers who later on turned businessmen and industrialists, lawyers 19 per cent, landlords four per cent, ex-civil bureaucrats two per cent, professionals (doctors, teachers, journalist) 14 per cent, full time politicians two per cent and others only one per cent. The BNP parliamentary party profile indicates that 57 per cent of the members were businessmen and industrialists, nine per cent ex-army officers now all businessmen and industrialists, 18 per cent lawyers, two per cent landlords, three per cent ex-civil bureaucrats, six per cent professionals and 2 per cent politicians. Eighty four per cent of the MPs had graduation and post-graduation degrees, 50 per cent were of 46 years and above and 68 per cent had no legislative experience.⁷⁷ Various parliamentary standing committees were made with parliamentarians only as chairmen.⁷⁸ These committees could influence in the policy making process.

Though the army appeared to maintain a low profile but they had good relations with the government. The defence budget was increased

from TK. 11,450 million in 1990 to TK. 18,080 million in 1995.⁷⁹ Unlike the Mujib government, the civilian government of Begum Khaledia Zia did not cut down on any financial benefits and privileges of the army, rather it tried to give benefits to them.

Economic Policy

Begum Zia regime believed in the notion of liberalism and free market economy, thus ushering in a new era of 'market economy' in the history of Bangladesh. High priority was given to macro-economic stability and economic growth, downsizing the role of the government, and attempts to reduce expenditure and increase taxes. The new industrial policy of 1991 prioritized private sector development. The NIP of 1991 had withdrawn the 'discourage list'. It introduced some regulatory measures to stop environmental degradation and promotion of public health. All sectors of industries except the 'reserved list' were open for private sector. Even telecommunication, electricity generation and transmission were dropped from 'reserved list'.⁸⁰ Different policy initiatives were taken to boost private sector development, such as easy credit facility, tax holiday and removal of earlier bans and controls. 'Privatization Board' was established to oversee the divestment process. Law was passed to enable SOEs be turned into public limited companies. Twelve SOEs were privatized. Even the government introduced golden handshake policy to reduce the burden of loss in the public sector enterprises. Foreign private investment was highly encouraged. The restriction on equity participation was withdrawn for the foreigners and foreign private capital was allowed to move without any control.

Agricultural Policy

In agriculture, fertilizers and seed distribution was done by private sector participation. Subsidies were withdrawn and private sector was allowed to import fertilizers. It was stated that *Khas* land would be distributed to the landless. Agriculture sector was not in the government priority agenda.

Trade Policy

Private sector played an important role in trade and business. Import and export policies were liberalized. Tariff rate was reduced. The share of import items increased by almost cent per cent by 1994. Exporters were given proportional income tax rebates on export earnings; the volume of both export and import had increased. The volume of import increased from US\$ 3470 million in 1990-91 to US\$ 5700 million in 1994-95 and the volume of export from US\$ 1993 million to US\$ 3500 million in the same year.⁸¹ In 1992, exchange rate was unified. Even *taka* had been made convertible on current account to relax foreign exchange control.

Economic Indicators

During this regime, the government was promised US\$ 8,491 million but it US\$ 8,028 million, of which 49 per cent was grants. The average GDP growth rate was 4.2 per cent and the economy had made significant mark in lowering the rate of inflation, building up of external reserves, and also in better handling of the budgetary process. There were TK.153,245 million savings, TK.79,000 fiscal deficits, 5.22 per cent inflation in 1994-95. The average GDP was TK.1,07,1358.⁸² Much progress was made by 1994 but that could not be maintained in the subsequent years due to political turmoil especially strikes called by opposition political parties in the country.

The ruling principle of the regime was the notion of civilian government with an all-powerful Prime Minister. The economy was driven by market forces. The political economy shaped its power structure and policy decisions.

THE SHEIKH HASINA REGIME (1996- 2001)

Awami League (AL) assumed state power in 1996 after 21 years in the opposition led by Sheikh Hasina Wajed, daughter of Sheikh Mujib. The AL of 1996 had changed from its earlier policy position i.e. of the days of 1966-75. A new leadership emerged with a different outlook. Hence the nature of dominance in the decision making process

also changed. The new government came to power in coalition with *Jatiya Party* and JSD (Rab). They were included, initially for forming the government and establishing a 'consensus government'.⁸³ But all decisions were taken and power rested in the hands of AL for all practical purposes. Hasina, as the Prime Minister was all-powerful and had personalized and centralized the power-structure.⁸⁴ She exercised widespread power with her own discretion. Some time, she consulted her senior cabinet members. She was aided by 18 cabinet ministers, 15 state ministers and two deputy ministers as on December, 1997. Their socio-economic background is not different from those in the cabinet of the earlier leaders. 50 per cent of the cabinet members were politicians, 11 per cent ex-civil bureaucrats, 11 per cent ex-army bureaucrats, 17 per cent lawyers, 5.5 per cent landlords and 5.5 per cent professionals. Important portfolios were given to those who had been in the government during 1972-75 and who had worked as advisers to the party and particularly to Sheikh Hasina. Most of them had graduation and post-graduation degrees and a few had foreign degrees. The Cabinet Ministers were the sons of landlords, petty businessmen, government servants and lawyers. The dominant positions were held by the politicians who were with the party before independence. The new emerging groups like the bureaucrats, military, businessmen played an important role in the decision-making process. Though Prime Minister Hasina was 'powerful' and 'more than equal' she took her cabinet colleagues into confidence in major decision-making process. In the Parliament, AL had 147 members and the other parties had 153 members (in the general category). A recent study shows that businessmen and industrialists occupied more than 74 per cent of parliament seats and the rest were from bureaucrats, politicians and other professional groups.⁸⁵ The presence of businessmen increased from 56 per cent in 1991 to 74 per cent. In 1996 election, AL gave nomination to those people who had more money with party loyalty as compared to 1991, like other parties. The dominance in decision-making shifted to businessmen turned politicians.

Economic Policy

The regime followed liberalism and free market economy. High priority was given to the economic growth and policies were being made to accelerate economic reforms. The regime's industrial policy was same as of the previous government. It gave all sorts of supports and incentives to the private sector which was regarded as "an engine of growth". Policies to make state owned enterprises (SOEs) profitable by improving efficiency and productivity were adopted. Priority was given for uniform development of industries at district and *thana* levels. High priority was given to foreign investment. The multi-nationals were allowed to invest in all sectors except in five on the grounds of strategy. Further new export processing zones (EPZ) were established to boost private investments. Even industrial park was being established in the private sector. The government announced export and import policy in 1998 and privatization policy in 2000 to boost further private sector development. As many as 10 enterprises were sold, 8 were handed over to employees and shares of 10 companies were also sold.⁸⁶

Agricultural Policy

In the field of agriculture, the government believed that wherever necessary, requisite subsidies should be provided to boost agricultural growth. The government provided necessary subsidies to boost agricultural development. The government took effective measures in distributing seeds, fertilizer and other agricultural inputs. This regime was successful in obtaining food sufficiency due to government support and good climatic conditions.

Trade Policy

The government announced new export and import policy in 1998. The import policy further reduced import control and provided incentive for export. Import policy relaxed the import of capital machinery and petroleum products in the private sector, with a few exceptions, like raw materials and fabrics for the garments industry. The rate of import duty was reduced to 40 per cent. The exporters were given more incentives than was done by the earlier government. Export credit was

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given to the exporters for 270 days per year. The exporter was allowed to take benefit of bonded warehouse facility, and deposited 40 per cent export earning to get foreign exchange and other benefits. Tariff rate was reduced and a package of fiscal measures to mobilize additional revenue was announced.

Economic Indicators

During Sheikh Hasina's regime the average GDP growth rate was better as compared to other regimes. The average GDP growth rate was 5.2 per cent in 1996-2000. The GDP of agricultural sector increased from 3.1 per cent in 1996 to 7.4 per cent while in the industrial sector it declined from 7 per cent to 6.2 per cent in the same period respectively. The GNP per capita was US\$ 360.⁸⁷ The domestic debt by the government increased to 34.51 per cent in 2000-01. Foreign exchange reserves were record low, at US \$1.08 billion. The average inflation rate was 8.82 per cent in March 1999 which later improved to 5.1 per cent in March 2000.⁸⁸

In conclusion, we can say that in the civilian government with an all-powerful Prime Minister, the economy was controlled by the market-driven forces. The political economy of the regime thus shaped its policy formulation and execution.

CONCLUSION

Following independence, some policies were guided by pre-liberation commitments rather than by exclusive policy compulsions.⁸⁹ During the 1972-75 period, the decision-making process was dominated by the civilians. Almost the entire industrial sector was controlled by the state. Private sector had very minimal role. But changes in regimes had changed the power structure as well as decision-making process and economic sector. The presence of businessmen and industrialists increased from 24 per cent in 1973 to 74 percent in 1996 and the economy was controlled by them. The quasi-presidential rule of General Zia and the military autocratic rule of General Ershad offered opportunities to the civil-military bureaucrats

and the pure military bureaucrats, respectively to dominate the decision-making process. The disinvestment policy of Zia and the denationalization and privatization policy of Ershad had opened up the path for the private sector to flourish. Private sector has been offered a leading role. The structural adjustment policies (SAP) shaped the policy guidelines of the governments. But, the mass uprising of 1990 had, once again, opened up avenues for the democratic practices to consolidate in Bangladesh. The governments of Khaleda Zia along with the government of Sheikh Hasina allowed civilian supremacy. The acceptance of micro-economic reforms, by both the governments, opened up the economy to the private sector and the foreign investor. The donor communities have been heavily influencing the policy options of the government as well as the economy in practice. But sheer dominance of business community in political and economic sphere has been shaping the country's political and economic situation to an undesirable destination of social imbalance and disharmony. The journey of political economy had started with one party dominance in the political arena and state dominance in the economic arena. Now it is almost bi-party system in the political arena and free market economy in the economic arena. This was necessary to adapt to the world environment of political economy.

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INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Anand Kumar

India and Bangladesh are natural friends because of the geographical proximity, cultural affinity and inter-dependence on trade and commerce. But in recent times political differences over a number of issues have made them distant neighbours. The chasm has increased further by the existence of a number of insurgent groups and Islamic terrorists in Bangladesh. India has seen Dhaka go from celebrating its liberation from Islamic/military orthodoxy to first flirting with and now virtually embracing the same obscurantism. This rising tide of Islamic extremism is posing serious threat to the internal security of India as these forces maintain links with terrorists operating in north-east India and provide recruits to fight in Jammu and Kashmir. Besides, a number of other issues like illegal migration, water sharing, trade etc. have caused serious setbacks in the bilateral relationship of both the countries.

Bangladesh emerged as an independent country on 16 December 1971 out of the Bangla national movement. During and immediately after Bangladesh's struggle for independence from Pakistan in 1971, India assisted refugees from East Pakistan, intervened militarily to help bring about the independence of Bangladesh, and furnished relief and reconstruction aid. But it was hardly realized at that time, that the same country would become a source of trouble for it, a few years down the line. Bengali nationalism retreated as Awami League fell out with country's powerful military and religion was used as a counterweight to League's seemingly secular ideology. The euphoria of 1971 soon died down following the August coup of 1975. Though Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972 -75) had retained "secularism", along with "democracy", "socialism" and "nationalism", as the state principles, his assassination and overthrow of his government by a military coup d'etat in August 1975 brought in Islam-oriented state ideology by shunning "secularism" and "socialism".¹ Gradually secularism started ceding ground to Islamic

nationalism and an opportunistic alliance took place between Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and military. It led to emergence of political Islam in Bangladesh in its post-independence era. The changing nature of government and polity was also reflected in the policies followed by the successive governments in Bangladesh towards India.

This link between religion and politics grew further during the period of military ruler Ershad. Islam was now made state religion. Ershad also revived *Jamaat-e-Islami* and facilitated return of several Jamaat leaders from Pakistan. These Islamic forces were further consolidated when Khaleda Zia became Prime Minister in 1991. However, bilateral relations warmed up in 1996 and a slight check was put on the activities of the Islamists after the Awami League government came to power. A 30-year water sharing agreement for the Ganges River was signed in December 1996, after an earlier bilateral water-sharing agreement for the Ganges River had lapsed in 1988. Both nations decided to cooperate on the issue of flood warning and preparedness. The government and tribal insurgents signed a peace accord in December 1997, which allowed for the return of tribal refugees who had fled into India, beginning in 1986, to escape violence in their homeland in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

But the Islamic forces regained their lost momentum after the October 2001 election, which has brought the four party alliance into power. Radical Islamists of Bangladesh are an important constituent of this coalition and have 16 seats in parliament.

Indo-Bangladesh relations in present times have suffered because of a number of contentious issues. Some of these issues are important from the Indian point of view, whereas others are significant for Bangladesh. There are also issues, which are important for both.

ISSUES IMPORTANT FOR INDIA

There are certain issues, which India thinks are important for its bilateral relations with Bangladesh. The prominent ones are following.

Illegal Immigration

For over a decade, India has been facing problem of illegal immigration on its eastern and north-eastern border. It is estimated that about 15 to 20 million illegal Bangladeshis are living in many states of the country and posing a serious threat to national security. But Bangladesh maintains that no citizen of that country was residing illegally in India.² However, unofficial sources in that country tell a different story.

According to a report of the Action Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC) presented at a seminar on October 20, 2002 in Dhaka in the presence of Joint Secretary of Women and Children Affairs Ministry, Ferdous Ara Begum, 10,000 to 20,000 women aged between seven and 24 are sent to India, Pakistan and the Middle East every year and used in flesh trade. Most of them are either illiterate or poorly educated. The report also highlighted that most women migrate to the Middle East or to India for jobs, but end up as sex workers.³ According to another report of the People's Empowerment Trust (PET) and the Jagarani Janakalyan Sangstha, some two lakh women were sent to various countries from Bangladesh during 1999. Officials of the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association say, some 70,000 women and children were sent abroad in 11 years till 2001.⁴ Other bodies like the United Nations have also inferred that immoral traffic from Bangladesh does exist. When the magnitude of human trafficking is such, the number of illegal immigrants is bound to be much higher.

It is feared that illegal migration is likely to increase in the coming years. Every year three million new faces are being added to Bangladesh's total population size of 130 million, which is likely to be doubled by 2050.⁵ Bangladesh is the most crowded place on earth. This will undoubtedly accentuate the problem of illegal migration.

The poverty-stricken Bangladeshis migrate to India in search of better opportunities. At one time favourable regimes in the bordering states made their job easier. Sometimes they were also welcomed to get an edge in the electoral process.⁶ But it has always been difficult

for India to guard its 4,100 kms. border with Bangladesh, which is highly porous. The decade-long illegal immigration in India's northeast is a serious threat to national security. Bangladeshis reportedly indulge in criminal activities in India. In recent times, several fringe fundamentalist groups have emerged on the Indo-Bangladesh border who maintain links with the terrorists operating in India's northeast. Over the years, Pakistan's ISI has also gained a base in Bangladesh indulging in subversive activities against India.

The increased threat perception in this region has forced India to take some steps, which are resented by Bangladesh for different reasons. The immigrants from Bangladesh are an important source of income for the country because of their remittances. Over the years, a large number of Bangladeshis have illegally settled in India. Now Bangladesh is scared at the prospect of so many people returning home as they will cut down the regular inflow of remittances, create the problem of resettlement and disturb law and order.

Cross-border Terrorism

India faces cross-border terrorism not only from the side of Pakistan but also Bangladesh. At least 30 terrorist and insurgent groups operating in north-east India have their bases in Bangladesh.

(a) *Terror Camps*

India believes that top insurgent leaders from the northeastern part of the country have been operating from Bangladesh and a number of terrorist organisations have established their camps in Bangladesh. The Border Security Force (BSF) handed over a list of 78 militant camps operating from Bangladesh to Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on October 23, 2003 during their meeting in Shillong. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) with 27 camps, followed by NSCN (I-M) with 14 camps topped the list. Besides, National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) has 14 camps, Meghalaya's Achik National Volunteers' Council (ANVC) nine, Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) five and three camps each of the People's Liberation

Organisation (PLA) and a little-known outfit Islamic United Reformation Protest of India (IURPI). The list also includes two camps of Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) and one of Manipur's Khanglei Yavol Khnna Lup (KYKL).

(b) ISI Network

The Indian Government has, on a number of occasions accused the external intelligence agency of Pakistan- Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of making direct use of Bangladeshi territory to infiltrate its agents and saboteurs across the border into India. The Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), and other state agencies of Bangladesh assist the ISI in this task. Speaking in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament), on November 27, 2002, India's External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, explicitly stated that the Pakistani High Commission in Dhaka had become the "nerve center" of ISI activities in promoting terrorism and insurgency in India.⁷

(c) Smuggling of Arms through Bangladesh

For a long time Bangladesh has been used as a transit route for smuggling of arms. Its Home Minister, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, validated this while he was speaking at a national workshop on drug control in Mirpur in February 2002. Chittagong district, especially its port area, is a major route for arms smuggling. Rohingya refugees supply arms to extremist groups and criminals in Bangladesh, including those in Dhaka. On June 27, 2003 Bangladeshi police recovered 62,112 rounds of Chinese rifle bullets and 120 kgs of explosives from an abandoned truck in the precincts of one Awami League (AL) leader Syed Akhlakur Rahman Pintu's house at Jogarpara village of Kahalu Police Station in Bogra.⁸ Subsequent raids in the neighbouring areas yielded more ammunition and explosives, which were later, found to be deadly RDX. It was the biggest ammunition haul so far in Bangladesh since its formation after the War of Liberation.⁹ Later investigations confirmed that these arms and ammunition were meant for terrorists operating in northeastern India.

(d) Islamic Fundamentalism

Islamists have become much more powerful in Bangladesh in recent times after the four-party coalition came to power in October 2001. Islamists parties like *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Bangladesh) and *Islami Oikya Jote* (IOJ) are important constituents of this coalition. These parties have avowed objective of establishing Islamist rule in Bangladesh. These groups not only pose a threat to the existing democracy in Bangladesh but also pose a challenge for India. Some of the prominent international Islamist extremist organizations like *Al-Qaeda* and *Jemmah Islamiyah* have become active in Bangladesh. Though groups like *Al-Qaeda* may not be directly active, a number of local groups are allied to them. The most important of them are *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (HuJI), *Jama'atul Mujahidin* and *Shahadat-e-Al-Hikma* (SAH). A number of terrorists belonging to *Al-Qaeda* and *Jemmah Islamiyah* have taken shelter in Bangladesh.¹⁰ These terrorists train local extremists during their stay in Bangladesh.

Infrastructure

Problem has also arisen between India and Bangladesh over the issue of development of infrastructure. Both the countries have divergent opinion on the issue of trans-shipment and road network.

(a) Trans-shipment

India wants Bangladesh to provide it with trans-shipment facility, which will facilitate the movement of goods to and from the landlocked northeastern states by reducing the distance.¹¹ It believes that this facility would give a major impetus to the development process of this backward area infested by insurgency. Besides, it can also yield some revenue to Bangladesh. But Bangladesh has been unwilling to grant this facility to India, which it interestingly enjoyed while this territory was ruled by Pakistan.

(b) Road network

As Bangladesh has denied India trans-shipment facility, now the latter plans to develop part of the proposed Asian Highway project

which links it to Thailand via Myanmar bypassing Bangladesh. It plans to construct roads through its north-eastern states of Assam and Manipur connecting to Thailand via Myanmar.¹²

Persecution of minorities

There has been resurgence of violence against the minorities in Bangladesh after the elections of October 2001 elections. Hindus who are seen as supporters of Awami League are primary targets of such violence. Though government promised investigation into cases of rapes, beating and the burning of property, no information was made public. The continuous violence against the minorities has created a fear psychosis leading to their exodus to the neighbouring states of India. In 1947, 28 per cent of the population in East Pakistan was Hindu, but it declined to about 8 per cent in 2001.¹³ Economic reasons are also behind the violence against Hindus. They are targeted so that their properties can be usurped. Threats are openly issued to them to leave the country.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Problem

The signing of the CHT accord with the Shanti Bahini in December 1997 restored peace in the region. However, successive governments have not taken interest to implement the essential features of the treaty. Significantly, the accord promised more autonomy by establishing a regional council. The Chakmas were also assured that their ancestral lands would be restored to them and the presence of the Bangladesh army would be reduced. However, these major outstanding issues have not been solved and the accord was opposed from the beginning by the Bengali settlers and a section of the Chakmas. The most prominent Chakma group opposing the accord – the United People’s Democratic Front (UPDF) – wants to continue the struggle for full autonomy of the CHT. Replying to a question in the Parliament on September 14, 2003, M K Anwar, Minister-in-Charge of the CHT affairs, stated that the Government was reviewing the CHT Peace Treaty of 1997 to determine if its clauses were in conformity with the Constitution.¹⁴ He asserted that the Government would amend any Article, which would be contrary to the features of the Constitution.

Tribal leaders have alleged that the lawmakers of the ruling party are instigating violence against the indigenous people. One such incident erupted on August 25, 2003 in Mahalchhari in which two persons were killed and nearly 2,000 tribesmen were rendered homeless after their houses were allegedly torched by Bengali settlers.¹⁵ Santu Larma, the Chief of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), held the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) Chairman and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) legislator Wadood Bhuiyan responsible for these incidents. He has also threatened to cancel certificates of permanent residence of the settlers in the CHT area. India wants an amicable resolution of the CHT problem, because it has been hosting a number of Chakma families as refugees.¹⁶

ISSUES IMPORTANT FOR BANGLADESH

There are certain issues, which Bangladesh considers as very important. However, the most prominent among them in recent times has been water sharing of common rivers. Though Bangladesh has also raised the issue of trade imbalance at regular intervals, trade related matters are of equal importance to both the countries. So are the issues like border demarcation and drug trafficking.

Water Sharing

India and Bangladesh have a long history of dispute over water sharing. Though both sides signed the Treaty on Ganges waters for a period of 30 years on 12 December 1996, new disputes have emerged in recent times.¹⁷ India is planning to develop its water resources by interlinking Himalayan rivers with those in its peninsular region through 30 interlinking canal systems to provide drinking water, power and irrigation. However, this proposal is still at a conceptual level and specific project would emerge after the feasibility study is completed and details are prepared. But, it has evoked criticism in Bangladesh. Bangladesh fears that vast quantities of water would be diverted from major rivers, including the Ganges and Brahmaputra to southern states of India.

ISSUES IMPORTANT FOR BOTH COUNTRIES

Some issues are of equal importance for both the nations, but a solution has eluded because of different positions taken by both the sides.

Border Demarcation

The issue of border demarcation between the two countries became very important after the clashes between Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) at a border outpost in Kurigram in April 2001. India accused Bangladeshi troops of occupying the border village of Pyrdiwah, forcing its residents to flee.¹⁸ This incident left 16 BSF personnel dead. Though low-key clashes between Indian and Bangladeshi border forces were common, the clash at the Kurigram was the severest between the border guards of the two countries in last 30 years. This incident seriously affected the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

The border issue has three sub-parts — the undemarcated 6.5 km-long tract, the existence of enclaves in each other's territory and the areas in adverse possession on the two sides.¹⁹ Both sides have agreed to solve the border issue through diplomatic means, but very little progress has been made. Though only 6.5 km out of 4,100 km is undemarcated, it created immense problem in the bilateral relationship. The Kurigram clash took place in two such undemarcated areas.²⁰

Indo-Bangladeshi Maritime Dispute

The Indo–Bangladeshi maritime dispute primarily focuses on differences in the principles by which the maritime boundary is to be demarcated, as well as disputed sovereignty over a small island. Whereas India has consistently favoured the 'equidistant'/'median-line' principle for the demarcation of maritime boundaries, Bangladesh favours the application of the 'equitable' principle alone.

Both India and Bangladesh also claim an island covering an area of 2 sq. miles, lying in the estuary of the Haribhanga and Raimongal rivers in the Bay of Bengal. This island emerged in 1970 due to acute

volcanic activity in the region and is known as New Moore or Purbasha in India, and South Talpatty in Bangladesh. The dispute over the island has more to do with the extent of the maritime zone to be potentially acquired in the oil rich Ganges–Brahmaputra delta of the Bay of Bengal, than the island itself. If India is given sovereignty over the island, it can claim an additional 16,000 sq. metres of continental shelf. However, if Bangladesh is given sovereignty over the island, it will get a much lesser area of the continental shelf. Several rounds of talks on the Indo–Bangladeshi maritime dispute since 1974 have produced no result.

Trade

Indo-Bangladesh trade relationship has been the cause for yet another controversy in the bilateral relations of the two countries. These differences become apparent during the trade talks taking place between the two countries at regular intervals. India exported goods worth US\$1.1 billion to Bangladesh in fiscal year 2001-02 while it imported only US\$50 million worth products. Trade deficit between the two countries stood at US\$590 million during the first six months of fiscal year 2003.²¹ To reduce this trade imbalance, Bangladesh demands easy and tariff free access to the Indian market on a non-reciprocal basis. As India has also to safeguard its business and trade interests, it has suggested another way out of this problem. It wants Bangladesh to sign a free trade agreement as India has done with Sri Lanka.

But Bangladesh is apprehensive about Free Trade Agreement, as it has no experience in this form of trade. However, both the countries have made some significant progress after their talks in Dhaka from October 20 to 22. They have granted concessions to each other on a number of long pending issues.²² India and Bangladesh have agreed on a revised draft of bilateral trade agreement that was signed on October 4, 1980. Once this agreement is approved by the two governments, it might form the basis of the FTA.

CONCLUSION

India shares its longest border with Bangladesh. On the other hand most of Bangladesh is locked by India. Hence both these countries are of great importance to each other. The border clashes, especially the Kurigram incident seriously harmed the relationship between the security forces of the two countries. The existing mechanism to prevent border incidents has not worked satisfactorily. Hence there is a need to evolve alternative methods. Though the BSF of India proposed joint-patrolling of the border, but unfortunately Bangladesh has not accepted it. An effective system of border management will also help to tackle other border-related problems such as smuggling, trafficking of women and children, illegal migration and hiding and passage of insurgents. Both the countries have recently made some progress on the FTA issue, but there is a need to pursue this matter further. Similarly, the disputes related to water sharing can also be solved by accommodating each other's interests. Interests of Bangladesh and India are so closely interwoven that these countries cannot afford to ignore each other.

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INDIA-BANGLADESH BILATERAL TRADE

Issues and Concerns

Indra Nath Mukherji

Trade offers immense opportunities for raising economic welfare of Bangladesh and India - the two neighbouring South Asian countries. Apart from being members of SAARC, geographical proximity as well as close historical ties makes these two countries natural trade partners. India, with a population of nearly 8 times and GDP about 9 times larger than Bangladesh, offers a large market for Bangladesh's exportable products. From Bangladesh's point of view therefore, access of her exports to the vast Indian market is of utmost importance.

On the side of import, the abundance of a wide variety of India's natural resources and its capacity to supply a wide range of essential consumer goods, primary and intermediate goods, as also a wide variety of machinery and capital equipment provide enormous opportunities to Bangladesh to obtain prompt supply of the much needed consumption and development imports at lower transportation cost than if these imports were to be obtained from distant sources.

Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh is conducted under the provisions of the prevailing Indo-Bangladesh Trade Agreement. First signed on 28 March 1972, the Agreement was an interim arrangement, which identified the commodities to be traded and fixed a monetary ceiling for export/import of each of the commodities with a view to achieving balanced trade. This was replaced by a new agreement in July 1973. The new agreement was amended in December 1974 to include a clause that bilateral trade between the two countries would be conducted in convertible currency with effect from 1 January 1975. The current agreement was signed on 4 October 1980 and has been extended for successive periods of three years.

Under the Indo-Bangladesh Trade Agreement, both India and Bangladesh provide Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment to each other. The Agreement does not provide any bilateral trade concessions. Such tariff concessions are accorded to each other only under the provisions of South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) signed in April 1993 and which became effective since December 1995. Under four rounds of negotiations held so far, India has offered concessions on 2927 products (at six-digit H.S. Classification) of which 2450 products have been offered exclusively to least development countries (LDCs) including Bangladesh. On the other hand, Bangladesh has offered concessions on 564 products to non-LDCs, including India.

Further, in August 1998, India decided to remove non-tariff barriers in respect of over 2300 products towards all the SAARC countries, including Bangladesh. In addition, India agreed to provide market access to 40 Bangladeshi products at 6-digit level under 16 categories in April 2002.

Table 1
Trends in India-Bangladesh Trade: 1991-92 to 2002-03
(US \$ Million)

Year	Exports to Bangladesh	Imports from Bangladesh	Balance of Trade	Total Trade
1991-92	226.25	2.07	224.18	228.32
1997-98	695.92	44.95	650.97	470.87
1998-99	992.38	63.72	928.66	1056.10
1999-00	633.69	72.82	560.87	706.51
2000-01	935.04	80.51	854.53	1015.55
2001-02	1002.18	59.12	943.06	1061.30
2002-03	1176.00	62.05	1113.95	1238.05

Source: DGCI&S, Kolkata

The table reveals that the total bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has been mainly on account of India's exports to Bangladesh. In contrast, there has been no perceptible increase in India's imports from Bangladesh. As a result, India's export: import ratio which was 11.61 in 2000-01, increased to 18.95 in 2002-03.¹

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The Bangladeshi perspective on growing bilateral trade imbalance is that historically India started liberalising her import regime much later than Bangladesh. Moreover, the pace of import liberalisation in India, after it began in the early 1990s, has been slower. Hence the average import tariffs in India are currently higher than in Bangladesh. Moreover, it is argued, that most imports into India are restricted by a wide array of non-tariff and para-tariff barriers.²

The above argument is however flawed. A recent World Bank study has shown that even today both Bangladesh and India stand out as being more trade restrictive than other South Asian countries. If both tariffs and para-tariffs were to be considered, then both the countries appear to be almost equally restrictive.³ Even if we accept the contention that India's trade regime was more restrictive than that of Bangladesh, there is no reason why this would result in greater trade imbalance with Bangladesh *provided India's trade restrictiveness was not discriminatory vis-à-vis Bangladesh*. This imbalance will wither away, once Bangladesh agrees to export its natural gas to India.

STRUCTURE OF BILATERAL TRADE

The composition of India's main exports to Bangladesh has been presented in table 2.

Table 2
India's Principal Exports to Bangladesh

Items	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
Cotton yarn, fabrics, made ups	123.40	157.20	175.99	145.16
Rice (other than Basmati)	533.74	83.53	65.01	16.11
Machinery & Instruments	36.03	24.88	57.46	72.06
Transport equipment	25.00	40.49	60.81	74.24
Glass/glassware/caramics/ refectories/cement	24.21	23.00	38.32	20.55
Primary & semi-finishes-iron & steel	16.50	32.78	26.03	25.62
Paper & wood products	7.98	10.29	20.94	28.18
Wheat			25.26	86.27

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Pulses	0.10	19.18	18.01	21.39
Dyes, Intermediates	12.06	11.89	13.95	12.60
Spices	4.31	10.91	15.53	9.77
Coal	27.24	22.05	29.95	39.79
Rubber manufactured products	15.88	12.70	13.21	14.54
Inorganic Chemicals etc.	5.62	7.30	22.04	18.48
Drugs/Pharmaceuticals	23.86	21.58	29.85	26.55
Total (including others)	995.37	636.92	874.41	945.52

The data reveals the wide range of products exported by India to Bangladesh. The products range from consumer goods, raw materials and capital goods including machinery and transport equipment. Cotton yarn, fabrics and made-ups constitute the basic raw materials for Bangladesh's rapidly growing garment industry. Essential consumer goods items, particularly rice and medicines are also exported to meet the country's food deficit and health requirements. This enables the country to keep down the prices of essential commodities consumed by vulnerable sections of the population. In table 3 India's main imports from Bangladesh is listed.

Table 3
India's Main Imports from Bangladesh

Items	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01
Jute raw	20.50	32.17	18.02
Textile yarn, fabrics, made-up artificial	14.21	11.98	20.13
Leather	1.46	0.82	1.51
Fruits & nuts	-	0.03	0.67
Inorganic chemicals	8.97	17.18	20.13
Total (including others)	62.39	78.25	78.39

Source: *CMIE*

The table clearly brings out the narrow range of products imported by India from Bangladesh. The exports of Bangladesh to India is dominated by only three major products, viz. raw jute, textile yarn fabrics, and inorganic chemicals. The demand for such products in India (excluding fertilisers) is quite limited. At the same time the supply capability of Bangladesh to India's demand for urea is constrained.

These factors explain the chronic bilateral trade imbalance between the two trading partners.

PREVALENCE OF NON TARIFF BARRIERS

Another factor highlighted frequently by Bangladesh as contributing to bilateral trade imbalance between the two countries is stated to be the prevalence of high incidence of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) in India. Bangladeshi exporters, government functionaries and academics have often stated that most of the NTBs in India are non-transparent and hence are difficult to identify. Some of the commonly used NTBs highlighted by them are as follows:

- Quantitative restrictions such as quotas, prohibitions and import licensing;
- Requirements of chemical tests, which take a long time causing goods to be stranded for indefinite periods under the open sky;
- Non-acceptance of certificates or value addition, which again causes goods to be stranded indefinitely;
- Imposition of tariff values and changes therein without prior notice;
- Imposition of countervailing and anti-dumping duties, often administered in a non-transparent manner;
- Frequent changes in customs regulations and procedures.
- Government monopoly in importing through state trading agencies (eg. fertilizers).

Given the problems faced by exporters from Bangladesh, India needs to ensure greater transparency in the application of non-tariff barriers. Mutual recognition of each country's standard as also mutual recognition of certificates of origin could help expedite the flow of goods between the two countries.

THE PREVALENCE OF ILLEGAL (INFORMAL) TRADE

A natural corollary of mutual trade restrictiveness has been the high incidence of illegal trade between the two countries. The volume of unofficial exports to Bangladesh is estimated to be around US \$ 368

million. The volume of such exports is estimated to be comparable to official exports to Bangladesh, though the composition and relative shares of the commodities vary considerably. More than half of the unofficial exports comprise food items and live animals (cattle). Other consumer goods account for over 15 per cent of unofficial exports. Among smuggling prone areas on the Indo-Bangladesh border, five districts of West Bengal account for as much as 83 per cent of the smuggled volumes.⁴

Unofficial imports from Bangladesh are confined to a small band of commodities, and comprise particularly of synthetic fabrics and spices. The proportion of gold / Bangladeshi take smuggled in, is as much as 44 per cent of the volume of unofficial imports from Bangladesh.⁵

According to another estimate (Bakht, 1996), in 1994, unofficial imports of Bangladesh amounted to US \$ 622 million, which was 1.5 times the official imports of US \$ 392 million. The smuggled items span a wide variety of products comprising textiles, sugar, cattle, bicycles and parts, medicines, cosmetics, cotton yarn, gold, electronic goods, cloves, etc. Illegal exports on the other hand, are comparatively less and amounted to US \$126 million over the same period. The actual trade deficit of Bangladesh (including both official and unofficial trade) was accordingly much higher than that reflected in the official estimates.⁶

INFRASTRUCTURAL BOTTLENECKS

The incidence of informal trade between the two countries is not only due to the incidence of high tariffs, but no less important, the consequence of infrastructural bottlenecks. Excepting Benapole, on the Bangladesh border, there is severe lack of infrastructural facilities in all other land routes. There is no proper customs bonded warehousing facilities at the Petrapole border on the Indian side. Similarly there is lack of proper truck terminals, adequate number of warehouse and cold storages at other border points on the Indian side, namely Hilli, Changrabandha, Mohadipur and Phulbari. As a result, the Bangladeshi

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exporter has to pay extra truck detention charge till the time he can hand over the consignment to the importer. The exporter also has to pay additional amount as interest charged by banks because receipt of foreign remittance against bills takes more than 21 days.⁷

The shipment by rail also presents some concerns. Shipments from India by rail depends on the availability of rakes and hence irregular. Besides the Bangladesh railway system is technologically incompatible with that of the Indian system. Further, the 6 kms. long Petrapole-Benapole rail route remains suspended during floods.⁸

LIMITED IMPACT OF SAPTA

Under the multilateral framework of SAARC, a South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) was signed in April 1993. Till date four rounds of negotiations have been held under SAPTA. Though initial negotiations are conducted bilaterally among pairs of Contracting States on the basis of offer and request lists, these negotiations are ultimately multilateralised at the end of negotiations. The number of products offered concessions increased progressively through the rounds, with the largest number of products being negotiated in the third round which became effective on 10 August 1999 for India and from 31 October 1999 for Bangladesh. The flow of trade under India's preferential imports from and export to Bangladesh is presented in table 4.

Table 4
India's Imports/Exports of Products Offered/Received
Concessions from Bangladesh
(Value in India Rs. Lacs)

Trade	Imports	Exports
1996-97	9257.49 (41.91)	10106.30 (3.28)
1997-98	12128.54 (64.22)	10271.49 (3.51)
1998-99	21091.93 (80.34)	9941.12 (2.37)

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1999-00	22903.33 (67.63)	12038.41 (4.37)
2000-01	24342.84 (66.19)	20005.47 (4.68)
2001-02	18,597.24 (65.98)	26841.29 (5.62)
Customs Notifications	(a)	(b)
Remarks	As LDC	As non-LDC

Note: Estimated from Ministry of Commerce Database

Figures in brackets show percentages of total bilateral exports/imports

- (a) Bangladesh has issued customs notifications for first, second, and third rounds for all non-LDCs (including India) on 11, 215, and 338 products on 07/12/95, 26/02/97, and 31/10/99 respectively.
- (b) India has issued customs notifications for first, second, and third rounds for all countries (including those exclusively for LDCs including Bangladesh) on 106, 904, and 1917 products on 07/12/95, 01/03/97 and 10/08/99 respectively.

The data reveals that in terms of absolute value of products conceded concessions, in the three rounds has been fairly balanced during the period under study. It will be observed that between 1997-98 and 2000-01 the value of India's preferential imports from Bangladesh was more than the value of its exports receiving concessions from Bangladesh. Again India's concessional imports from Bangladesh as a percentage of its bilateral imports was far higher (varying from 42-80 per cent) than the share of its concession receiving exports from Bangladesh (varying from 3-6 per cent). The import value and share of India's preferential bilateral imports increased between 1996-97 and 1998-99 but could not be sustained thereafter even though the number of products offered concessions had been increased substantially in the following years. On the other hand, India's share of preference receiving exports in the country's total bilateral exports to Bangladesh increased steadily, from 3.3 per cent to 5.6 per cent between 1996-97 and 2001-02. The increase was particularly marked since the third round.

A number of factors have been highlighted for the inability of Bangladeshi exporters to benefit from India's offer of tariff preferences.

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It is stated by the Dhaka Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce & Industry that in respect of most of the products, Bangladesh did not have any export potential. For instance, in the first round India granted tariff concession on 106 items, of which special concession was given on 62 items for LDCs. Out of these 62 items, 13 items were given 100 per cent, and the rest 50 per cent tariff preference. However, most of the items in which concessions were offered in that round were irrelevant to Bangladesh. Only in 7 out of the 106 items on which India offered concession, Bangladesh had any export potential. On the remaining 99 items, there was no export from Bangladesh.⁹

Again, it has been stated that except for dried fish and urea, which were given duty free access (100% preference) to the Indian market, the items were subjected to high rate of tariffs. For example, preferential tariff of 50 per cent on the MFN rate of 50 per cent on products like toothpaste, tableware, paperboard, gloves, apparels, biscuits, chocolate etc., made it virtually impossible for Bangladesh's products to compete in the Indian market with India's domestic products. Also products like toothpaste and tableware were not eligible for SAPTA concessions because of the rule of origin requirements, being 30 per cent for Bangladesh as an LDC.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry has further stated that among the 2588 items on which concessions were offered to LDCs, all but 170 items were subjected to a wide variety of non-tariff barriers that were being applied by India in a non-transparent manner. Besides, in addition to tariff and non-tariff barriers, there were para-tariffs which limited Bangladesh's exports to India.¹⁰

Rahman (2003), again while referring to non-tariff barriers points out that taking advantage of the preferential treatment under apparently favourable rules of origin requirement of 30 per cent is perceived to be difficult for Bangladesh. It is a generally accepted principle that it is the country of origin which provides the Rules of Origin certificate. However, in case of exports to India the Assistant Collectorate of Customs has to be satisfied as to whether a particular export item

complies with the rules of origin criteria. The delay in assessment sometimes takes more than 10-20 days. He cites the example of export consignments of dry batteries from Bangladesh which was refused preferential entry to India on rules of origin criteria.¹¹

BILATERAL FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

India has long standing bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with Nepal and Bhutan. The most recent FTA has been with Sri Lanka, which was signed in December 1998 and which became operational from March 2000. India's FTA with Sri Lanka has been hailed as a success since this has resulted in a greater expansion of Sri Lankan exports to the vast Indian market. *This has demolished the small country syndrome of inevitable unequal trade relationship with a larger trading partner.* On the contrary, the Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement has resulted in a substantial decline in Sri Lanka's trade imbalance with India. Encouraged by this development, both the countries are now positioning themselves to launch Indo-Sri Lanka Economic Partnership Agreement that would include among other things, services as well.

The realised success of India's free trade agreement with Sri Lanka has generated new interest between India and Bangladesh to launch a similar bilateral free trade agreement between them. The recent landmark achievement of the Twelfth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad from 4-6 January 2004 to launch South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) could possibly reduce the relevance of a bilateral free trade agreement. However, the SAFTA process could be slower since a draft treaty for a free trade agreement would be in place only by January 2006. Besides, the multilateral approach under SAPTA has not really helped Bangladesh very much in enabling it to enter the Indian market in any significant way. Thus the rationale of a bilateral free trade agreement could possibly rest on a faster track approach to bilateral trade liberalisation with India liberalising earlier and deeper while allowing Bangladesh a longer time frame to do so.

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Rahman, favouring a bilateral FTA with India, has argued that this would do away with the complex “offer and request” lists under current preferential trading arrangement system and enable the two countries to go for all inclusive lists. FTA, with duty-free and quota-free access, will make Bangladesh products competitive in the Indian market where tariff rate on potential Bangladeshi export is still relatively high. Besides, zero-tariff access to Indian markets is likely to attract Indian market oriented foreign direct investment flows to Bangladesh.¹² A word of caution here is in order. Identical parallel with Indo-Sri Lanka free trade agreement may not hold with respect to similar free trade agreement with Bangladesh. This is because, as stated above, infrastructural weaknesses still exist in a large measure which prevents free flow of goods as well as capital between the two countries. Besides, the two major political parties in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Awami League still look upon India as a hegemonic power in the region. As a result, Indian capital is still quite reluctant to enter Bangladesh which does not match the infrastructure that Sri Lanka offers. Hence unlike in Sri Lanka, Indian capital may not invest in Bangladesh in any significant measure with buy-back arrangement.

BANGLADESH’S REQUEST FOR DUTY-FREE ACCESS

Since the past several years Bangladesh has been requesting India to unilaterally withdraw all tariff and non-tariff restrictions on products in which Bangladesh has actual or potential export interest. They state that this is permitted both under WTO rules as also under the SAPTA Agreement. In early 1990s Bangladesh submitted a list of 36 products to Government of India seeking duty concessions. Later in 1977, it again sought duty-free access on a list of 25 products. The latest list of products on which Bangladesh has sought concessions (List A), and products on which duty concessions have been conceded by India (List B) is presented in table 5 below.

Table 5
List of Products on which Bangladesh has Sought Concessions (List A), and Products on which Duty Concessions have been Conceded by India (List B)

List A	List B
Artificial flower, accumulators battery, carbon rod, carton, ceramics products, cosmetics and toiletries, electrical goods, electric cable and wire, furnace oil, footwear, jute products, knitwear, leather products, melamine and plastic products, prepared food. soap, tea, terry towel, woven RMG.	Prepared foodstuffs, medicaments, perfumery, soaps, articles of leather and animal gut, artificial flowers, articles of base metal, electric equipment and parts, optical instruments, and wooden furniture.

An earlier study by Mukherji¹³ (1999) had studied the implications for India conceding concessions on the 25 product groups requested by Bangladesh. The products requested may be disaggregated in terms of harmonised system of coding. This generates a list of 134 products of which 131 are under 6-digit classification. One of them- furniture, is based on 4-digit classification and two of them – pharmaceutical products and cosmetics and toiletries are at the level of two-digit classification (called chapters).

The maximum number of concessions had been requested for textile & textile articles- primarily jute and jute products, knitwear, and woven ready-made garments. All products based on pharmaceuticals and cosmetics & toiletries have been requested duty-free entry. Next in importance comes machinery and mechanical appliances - mainly electric cable and wire. There is request for a number of products based on ceramics, leather, melamine and plastic products.

A scrutiny of the data for India's imports from Bangladesh for the year 1997-98 indicates that not all the products requested by

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Bangladesh were in fact, being imported by India. Only 14 products classified under 8-digit code were being imported. By far the most important product being imported by India in 1997-98 under the request list was raw jute. Next in importance came black tea. Lead-acid of a kind used for starting piston engines was also an important item in India's imports from Bangladesh. The other important items being imported were ceramic tableware, plastic granule polyethylene, and artificial flowers. The total imports of these products were valued at Rs. 522.33 million, equivalent to 28 % of India's total imports from Bangladesh and 11.5 % of India's imports of such products from rest of the world. If the share of raw jute is excluded, this share will be quite insignificant.

The total revenue loss on account of duty-free imports on the basis of existing trade flows and assuming inelastic imports is estimated at Rs.197.28 million. Of this amount, Rs.0.56 million loss in revenue could be anticipated on account of imports conceded concessions under various SAPTA negotiations. The inclusion of raw jute under duty-free imports has made most of the difference in revenue loss anticipated under the duty-free list. The loss in revenue will be less if imports from Bangladesh increase as a result of duty-free imports.

The study highlighted some manufactured products in India, which were also being imported from Bangladesh under the proposed list of duty-free imports. It was observed that the share of Bangladesh's imports in India's domestic production and value of black tea was merely 0.03 % and 0.05 % respectively. In case of polyethylene granules the Bangladesh's share of imports was only 0.02 % both in terms of production and value. In case of tableware and kitchenware of china clay, the share of Bangladesh's imports to domestic production was only 0.15 %. In case of jute yarn and bakery products, the share of Bangladesh's imports in domestic production was negligible. It thus appears that Bangladesh's imports under the proposed duty-free imports constitutes a negligible share of India's competing domestic industries and hence unlikely to cause any damage or injury to industry.¹⁴

POLICY OPTIONS

Growing merchandise trade imbalance is one major concern of Bangladesh in its relations with India. The trade imbalance gets further magnified when informal trade as also trade in services gets factored in. From the point of economic theory however, it is an accepted principle that each country should endeavour to attain global payments balance that included both current and capital account balance, rather than a narrow bilateral trade balance under the current account. If this was not an accepted principle, each country would seek to achieve bilateral trade balance with all its trading partners. To illustrate this point, Bangladesh's trade figures for 2001-02 reveals that this country had a trade imbalance with China to the extent of US \$ 822 million and on the other hand a trade surplus of US \$ 1.9 billion with the US. Yet this issue has not been raised by Bangladesh with China nor would Bangladesh relish if the US were to urge Bangladesh to take measures to balance its trade with the former country. The US is one of Bangladesh's principal markets for its growing garment industry. Without access to India's cheap fabric and yarn as raw material, it would have been even more difficult for Bangladesh to enter competitively the US market to generate that level of trade surplus with the latter. It thus appears that Bangladesh tends to unduly overplay and even politicise its trade deficit status with India.

Having noted as above, this is not an argument to suggest that India need not preferentially liberalise its trade with Bangladesh. Apart from the political accommodation on part of India, there are cogent economic arguments in favour of India offering unilateral trade concessions to Bangladesh from the point of view of India's long term interests. Given the high import intensity of Bangladesh's exports to India and rest of the world, each unit of exports to India of textile products would translate into fabric and yarn exports from India to Bangladesh. Similarly, increasing income and employment generated in Bangladesh following additional exports to India would lead to additional imports from the latter country, given the country's high income elasticity for imports. India's further gain could be the emergence

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of stakeholders in Bangladesh benefiting from access to the vast Indian market.

A bilateral free trade agreement between India and Bangladesh could open the possibility of a faster track approach to bilateral trade liberalisation as the Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement has visibly demonstrated. It may be noted that India's bilateral trade has so far been more balanced with those countries with which it has bilateral free trade agreements (such as Nepal and Bhutan) than those countries with which it does not have such an agreement (such as Bangladesh, Maldives and Pakistan). In the three years since India's bilateral free trade agreement with Sri Lanka, the trade imbalance even though quite marked, is getting moderated over time.

It has been noted that under SAPTA more than half of India's bilateral imports from Bangladesh have already been subjected to tariff concessions. The proposed bilateral free trade agreement can be meaningful only if the coverage of products, including those specifically requested by Bangladesh, is extended to all products except those that fall in the Negative List to be negotiated between the two countries. The impact of this on the domestic economy of India is unlikely to be marked as the study on SAPTA concessions as also the study on 25 products requested for liberalisation by India has demonstrated.

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RISE OF RELIGIOUS RADICALISM IN BANGLADESH

Apratim Mukarji

Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim country and one of the poorest nations in the world, remains a relatively tolerant society (in relation to Muslim countries with Islamic fundamentalism on the rise) where shocking poverty co-exists with a surprisingly sophisticated literary tradition and an exhilaratingly vibrant artistic milieu.¹ This is the nation which was born in the bloody environs of a genocide, armed with the unconventional slogan of a language-borne nationalism. Even though abysmally poor and far from being on the road to development and eventual prosperity and despite the long tradition of a fairly well-entrenched Islamic fundamentalism of the village *mullah* (Muslim priest) variety, Bangladesh is still comfortably away from sliding into the unenviable slot of being a hostage to religious fanaticism and international terrorism.

Nevertheless, the country is increasingly engaging global attention in the wake of the post-11 September 2001 period because of a discernible rising graph of Islamic fundamentalist activities and terrorist acts. While the Begum Zia government continues to dismiss international media and human rights reports as “motivated western propaganda based on unvarnished lies”, there is growing concern in neighbouring India and in the wider international community that there is danger of the situation getting out of hand unless timely effective action is taken.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of Islamic fundamentalism widening its network in the country is the remarkably unobtrusive manner of its working. Except the unhindered attacks on religious minorities during and after the last general election (in which the secularist Awami League was defeated and the Bangladesh National Party or BNP returned to power and formed government with the rank fundamentalist *Jamaat-e-Islami*, leading to widespread condemnation), fundamentalist forces are working out their agenda apparently

sporadically, seemingly in an isolated manner and usually without fanfare and, always with little or no interference by the authorities. It is this virtually silent (though at times quite strident) way of spreading their tentacles, while gradually neutralizing secular and progressive forces that marks Bangladeshi Islamic fundamentalists out. Day by day, through various acts of sustained propaganda, acts of terrorism and intimidation and discernible government apathy and, on occasions, outright neutrality, fundamentalist forces are gaining ground and elbowing secularists out. Without going into the argument whether religious fundamentalism is indeed stronger in the country today than before, one can discern the situation better by measuring the fortunes of secularism, which indeed are dwindling.

It is also significant that religious bigotry and radicalism are spreading mainly in the countryside and less so in urban areas, giving rise to two parallel developments: firstly, happenings in rural areas being usually out of immediate media attention and concern, reap the benefit of a sizeable cushion time to consolidate its new holdings; and secondly, the urban conglomerates being generally out of the focus of Islamists, the government and the intelligentsia are able to continue to argue that the misgivings about Bangladesh turning into a haven for Islamic fundamentalists are misplaced.

Yet another characteristic peculiar to Bangladesh is the strong dislike of its secular forces and intellectuals to acknowledge that Islamic fundamentalism is not only drawing blood but is actually becoming bolder than before. Almost in a manner reciprocal to the fundamentalists' desire to work mostly behind the scene to intimidate and neutralize secular forces, the latter are also uneasy to come out in the street and publicly condemn and fight religious radicalism and terrorism. This was why even eminent proponents of secularism were visibly unhappy when the storm over feminist writer Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (Shame) and over her observations on the Qur'an broke out. They proved right in a major sense: they had argued that Nasrin had merely succeeded in providing a very visible platform to fundamentalists by openly criticizing her country. This was true; for, all responsible

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analysts hold that Islamic fundamentalism received a boost at the time, which facilitated its steady growth since then. Bertil Lintner, who has been largely instrumental in exposing the rise of Islamic extremism in Bangladesh, writes, “The Muslim radicals first came to international attention in 1993, when author Taslima Nasrin was forced to flee the country after receiving death threats from Islamic fundamentalists who objected to her critical writings about what she termed outdated religious beliefs. Extremist groups offered a \$ 5,000 reward for her death. While Nasrin’s outspoken feminist writings caused controversy even among moderate Bangladeshi Muslims, the entire state was shocked when in early 1999, three men attempted to kill Shamsur Rahman, a well-known poet and a symbol of Bangladesh’s secular nationhood. During the ensuing arrests, the police said they had seized a list of several intellectuals and writers (including Nasrin) whom local fundamentalist groups had branded enemies of Islam.”²

But the very fact that even moderates were unhappy at Nasrin’s rather loud expose’ of the contradictions in Islamic beliefs and practices also underlines the increasing uneasiness with which the battle between rationalism, secularism and democracy on the one hand and religious bigotry and fundamentalism on the other hand is being fought in Bangladesh. The point to note is that the uneasiness is solely on the part of secularists, while fundamentalist forces are clearly tasting blood and liking it.

The following example is telling enough. Sometime last year, a world leader in market research quietly pulled out of Bangladesh after its Indian and Bangladeshi researchers were continuously harassed and at times threatened by strangers. Repeated complaints to the police proved ineffectual and till the end the attackers remained elusive and unidentified. The multinational corporation, however, found out on its own that the threats had come from Islamic fundamentalist groups which apparently could function without interference from local authorities. Even more interestingly, the MNC realized that its researchers were targeted because the fundamentalists had taken them to be “foreign spies.” Market research, one understands, consists

chiefly of asking questions to people on the street in order to gauge public opinion about an issue or a product. That precisely was what had marked the researchers out as suspects in this particular case, for they were seen to be asking questions to people at random.

The incident was never reported in the media. But this article mentions it in order to put the incident in the right perspective, because it symbolizes the manner of the steady rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh. Two basic aspects of Islamic fundamentalism hold true in the case of Bangladesh: firstly, it has been present throughout the history of the erstwhile East Pakistan and its successor Bangladesh, and secondly, while it has been growing in stature and strength steadily, it is still not the singularly dominant force in the South Asian country and that the country retains enough political and intellectual strength to checkmate the twin menace of Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism.

Many Bangladeshis react strongly to suggestions that Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise in the country and point out, in support of their contention, the fact that secular forces are still able to hold their ground in times of crisis. They also point out that religious fundamentalism is rising not only in their country but in many other developing countries as well, including India. The Bangladesh government holds the view that a motivated international campaign, spearheaded by Western media, is behind the canard that religious intolerance and bigotry are growing in the country. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia told the Commonwealth Journalists' Association in Dhaka on 17 February 2003: "The foreign media are undermining the position of (Bangladesh) by carrying out a campaign against the administration." Ridiculing the "propaganda" that thousands of Hindus and Christians were fleeing to India in the face of religious persecution, she said, "This is not true. I ask you to make your own personal enquiries and publish the truth." She said that there were three sets of "false" propaganda against her government. The one that she was running the country with the help of Islamic fundamentalists "was not true," she countered. With regard to the second, she said, "my party, Bangladesh National Party (BNP), won nearly two-thirds of the seats

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in the last general election and we could have formed a government by ourselves. Yet, we decided to form a partnership with *Jamaat-e-Islami* to honour a commitment made before the election.” As for the third “lie”, she said, “The third propaganda is that Bangladesh is playing host to the *jihadis* (religious fighters) from Afghanistan and beyond and that Bangladesh has allowed deadly cargo to be imported secretly and, therefore, people should be afraid of Bangladesh...Again, this is complete fabrication. The picture is quite the opposite. Bangladesh supported the Western move in dislodging the Taliban government in Afghanistan.”³

The experience of the marketing MNC, with which this article begins, is particularly relevant in the context of various Bangladeshi denials; for, while the corporate entity itself is western, its employees and temporary hands who had experienced harassment and threat during their field work were either Bengali-speaking Indians or Bangladeshis.

In late January 2003, two incidents happened involving Indians which again exposed the shadowy display of Islamic fundamentalism with the authorities succumbing rather cozily to its diktat. First, a women’s football team from West Bengal was sent back unceremoniously after playing two matches with Bangladeshi girls after *Tawhidi Janata* of indeterminate origin threatened to stage a sit-in demonstration outside the playground on the grounds that women playing football was “degrading and obscene.” A few days later, a team of Indian female models, arriving to participate in an international trade fair, was first held up at Dhaka airport and then sent back home after their show was cancelled. There was no explanation for the cancellation but the shadowy presence of Islamic fundamentalist groups could be surmised.

There are two significant aspects of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh. Firstly, the major anti-Awami League players like the Bangladesh army and the BNP have actively and openly sought help of fundamentalist forces in order to checkmate or counter the Awami League and secular forces. If fundamentalist forces have travelled

an impressive length of road since the birth of Bangladesh, the credit largely goes to leaders like the two former army chiefs who first usurped power and then in time became presidents, Zia-ur-Rahman and Mohammad Ershad. The very fact that *Jamaat-e-Islami*, which was the handmaiden of the Pakistani army during the genocide in 1971, shares power with the legitimate Zia government, speaks volumes about the remarkably wide space that the country offers today to Islamic fundamentalism and concomitant terrorism.⁴ Secondly, despite their growing clout, Islamic fundamentalist forces continue to prefer to work out of shadowy fronts via obscure and often unheard-of organizations. The important thing is that despite this seeming handicap, the impact they are able to create is deadly and scary enough to further shrink the space for secularism and religious tolerance. Very few would have known about *Tawhidi Janata* before the organization was able to drive the West Bengal girls out of the country. It is precisely because each time such little known groups are able to persuade the authorities to fall in line and carry out their diktats that the assumption follows that the two are actually hand in gloves with each other.

Islamic fundamentalism is, however, not rising in a vacuum and to obtain a fuller picture, one has to take into account two other parallel and inter-linked developments, the continuing persecution of religious minorities and the frequent trampling of human rights of those especially who actively fight Islamic fundamentalism. It was no mere coincidence that the last general election and the subsequent victory of the BNP and Jamaat witnessed a fresh bout of religious persecution, especially against the Hindus who today comprise only about 9 per cent of the total population (according to the 1941 Census, the community accounted for as much as 28 per cent of the population of East Bengal; in 1961, the figure was down at 18.5 per cent and, by 1984, the Hindus were only 13.5 per cent of the population). While Jamaat is not directly accused of masterminding the anti-Hindu riots and other forms of repression, the minorities themselves tend to blame *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (HUJI, the Movement of Islamic Holy War), which is considered to be the most militant group in the country and named as a terrorist organization

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by the US State Department having connections with Islamic militants in Pakistan.⁵ The Indian government has since linked the HUJI with the January 2002 attack on the American Center in Kolkata.

While Dhaka is keen for obvious reasons to deflect some of the growing international concern for rising Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh, blaming the Western media for the unwelcome attention, the fact is that secular Bangladeshis are increasingly worried over the situation. It should also be kept in mind that it is not only religious minorities who are suffering as religious fundamentalism is growing stronger; secular Muslims who do not hesitate to express their opposition to Islamic fundamentalism are also victims of vindictive and intimidating attacks. A typical example of such expressions of concern was a statement made by President of the Bangladesh Communist Party Manjurul Ahsan Khan issued on 9 February 2003, disputing the Zia government's claim that neither the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan nor Al-Qaeda was active in the country. On the contrary, he contended that both were active in Chittagong district, the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Rajshahi district where *Jamaat-e-Islami* had a support base. "The outfits are carrying out covert activities to destabilize the region and the government should be active in identifying their agents, cut off the sources of funding and channel of arms supply," he argued. Pointing out that "anti-liberation forces" like *Al-Badr*, *Al-Shams* with international terrorist links were also "very much active" in Bangladesh, the communist leader urged Dhaka to initiate steps to arrest and put on trial the 1971 war criminals (those who had colluded with and helped the Pakistan army in carrying out the genocide against Bangladeshis), instead of taking "a cheap anti-India stand."⁶

Any study on Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh is bound to reflect from time to time upon the fairly congenial environment for such development to take place. The very fact that two former army chiefs and subsequent presidents had officially sought cooperation of fundamentalist forces in order to retain power and weaken the Awami League indicates that various governments have not only shied away from such practices but in reality have actually indulged in it. The latest

example was available during and after the last general election which brought Begum Zia and her BNP back to power. The sudden acceleration of anti-minorities and, in particular, anti-Hindu activities including destruction of places of worship and rape of women during and after the polls was definitely facilitated by the inclusion of *Jamaat-e-Islami* in the new government. The Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), an eminent Bangladeshi non-governmental organization (NGO), referred to a local report according to which the minorities had clearly suffered following the defeat of the Awami League in the general election. Amnesty International reported in December 2001 that Hindus in particular had come under attack in the aftermath of the election. While Hindu temples were ransacked and villages destroyed, more than 100 Hindu women were reportedly raped.

While the government denies strongly the presence of Al-Qaeda and other international terrorist groups in Bangladesh, its own actions establish the growing clout of fundamentalist-terrorist groups. The Zia government proscribed *Shahadat-al-Hikma*, an Islamist extremist group allegedly funded by the Karachi-based underworld don and the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts accused Dawood Ibrahim. Announcing the government's decision to ban the group, Home Minister Altaf Hussain Chowdhury told Parliament on 16 February 2003 that this organization had been considered a threat to peace and security. He also said that the ban became effective from 9 February 2003.⁷

A disturbing trend in the country is the apparently uncontrolled and haphazard growth of clandestine religio-extremist organizations, promoted by mainly rural youths alienated from the city-based political elite and clearly enamoured of the grassroots-based village mullah. On a website the following report, one of the many published during the spate of terrorist bomb outrages in various districts during 2002, talks of one such scarcely heard-of groups.

Entitled "Severe bomb blast at Dinajpur: again on the day following Eid ul Azah, " the report said:

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Many historians think that history repeats itself. But we didn't think that our terrorists or their godfathers read the writings of those historians who believed in such social dynamics. The terrorists made history at least in the domain of terrorism in Bangladesh to repeat itself. These people have not forgotten the events of Mymensing where precisely on the day following Eid-ul-Fitr five cinema halls were the scene of severe bomb blasts in which at least 18 people died and hundreds of people were severely injured. The notorious anti-social elements backed by fundamentalists of different political shades once again reminded us that whether Operation Clean Heart is on or off, they can do any menace whenever and wherever they want to.

The report continued:

This time they have chosen the northernmost district town of Dinajpur. According to the late night news as reported by Channel 1, a severe bomb explosion took place at the heart of the town in a house located at a *mohalla* (locality) known as Chhoto Gurgola at about 6.30 morning today (13 February 2003), the day following Eid-ul-Azah. According to the report, as many as seven bombs were exploded in a house that has been almost completely destroyed. Several persons have been injured. The police have cordoned off the house and journalists were barred from taking pictures of the place of occurrence, the damaged house or the injured persons. According to the report, many eyewitnesses said that just immediately after the explosions, a microbus removed at least two injured persons to an unknown destination. The police are keeping silent about the matter and have not been able to trace the fleeing microbus with its passengers. However, the police arrested three persons from within the house all in a severely injured condition. They are Shagu, Shafiqul and Badal. The eyewitnesses opined that the bombs had exploded perhaps while some were being made. It is learnt that after two minutes of interval, two bombs and then within 15 minutes a total of seven bombs were exploded. The police have confiscated a mobile telephone, few publications of an organization named *Jamiyatul Mujahedin* and some monograms describing how to make bombs, nails, sand and other materials including explosives thought to be useful for

bomb-making. *The event is a reminder to all of us that whether Al-Qaeda or no Al-Qaeda or whether ISI agents are active or not in Bangladesh, armed terrorist groups contributing to fundamentalism and conservatism are very much active in Bangladesh and that they are fast learning the know-how of making and using modern weaponry.*⁸

The website thereafter investigated the little-known *Jamiyatul Mujahedin* and came up with the following information:

Nobody knows how the organization came into existence and how it is being funded. Is it just an indigenous group or part of a greater network nationally or internationally connected? It is learnt that Islamic institutions such as *madrassas* (Islamic religious schools) for girls, a Jikir training centre for women. The organization has 21 branch offices in the sadar upazila itself. The same Hafiz Shahidullah took on rent a house from one Shahid Hosain Ratan at a monthly rent of Tk 2,500 where a women's *madrassa* has been operating. In another locality known as Suihari, the same Hafiz took on rent another house from one Abul Hosen where he has started the said Jikir training centre for women. Sometime back a report regarding questionable activities of the Jikir centre was published in a popular national daily. There are other people like Hafiz Shahidullah who either in their own names or under fictitious names are running these activities of the organization. A question (that keeps) peeping in the mind is how deep the root of the Dinajpur bomb blast lies. Does the Dinajpur explosion have any connection with the Mymensing episode or are the two just isolated events carried out by two isolated terrorist groups? The report alleged that the persons injured in the bomb blasts escaped successfully and had since been under treatment clandestinely. While not alleging any collusion between the alleged bomb makers and the law and order machinery, the report implied that the police were not quite forthcoming on the matter.⁹

Credible reports available from both Bangladeshi and international media and from foreign diplomats stationed in Dhaka indicate that the role of the police has changed substantially while dealing with fundamentalist forces, when compared to the pre-general election

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period. This change has, at least to some extent, been engineered by the sustained and frequently vicious propaganda unleashed by *Jamaat-e-Islami*, elements from before the election and since then. Amir of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, Maulana Matiur Rahman Nizami, who was the foremost war criminal during the war of liberation for having led the infamous *Al-Badr* exterminating force in liquidating thousands of Bengali-speaking intellectuals in December 1971, and who is now an important member of the Begum Zia cabinet (the other, equally notorious, *Jamaat-e-Islami* leader Abdul Kader Molla, “the Butcher of Mirpur”, was later sanctified as the publicity secretary of the fundamentalist organization), said at Jhinaidaha on 11 February, 2001:

The Awami League government has launched a movement to destroy Islamic consciousness and Muslim identity in order to serve Indian interests. The manner in which the government has capitalized on the murder of the police during the *hartal* (general strike) in Dhaka and has let loose the police force and its own henchmen on the bearded and *topi* –clad Muslims indicates that the murder of the policeman was premeditated. This incident was perpetrated in order to create a congenial atmosphere to uproot what the government prefers to call fundamentalism.” Reporting the speech, *Daily Sangram* said, “As the vast crowd cheered frequently, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* leader said, “The government has let loose terror in the *madrassas* and mosques which are being raided and searched and teachers, students and *mullahs* being harassed.

This article begins with the outburst of an apparently liberal Bangladeshi who appears to have lost patience with the tendency to question the authenticity of the liberal credentials of his country. It would be profitable at this juncture to take note of the fact that some of his countrymen had long ago given up on those credentials. The eminent scholar Muhamad Ghulam Kabir had argued way back in 1994 that Maj. Gen. Zia ur-Rahman, who seized power in the mid-1970’s, “successfully changed the image of Bangladesh from a liberal Muslim country to an Islamic country.”¹⁰ The concept of secularism as a cornerstone of Bangladesh’s constitution was buried by Zia in 1977 though the others like democracy, nationalism and socialism were retained. The recitation of

Quranic verses at public functions became a regular practice, the honour of initiating it going to his party BNP. The trend was not only continued but strengthened during the rule of Lt. Gen. Hossain Muhammad Ershad with Islam becoming the state religion in 1988 and Fridays replacing Sundays as the weekly holidays. To Ershad also goes even more dubious credit of resurrecting the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (he invited the fundamentalist leaders to return home) which was virtually defunct in the early days of independent Bangladesh with its leadership in hiding in Pakistan. While the leadership had begun to return during the Zia rule, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and with it the slogan of Islam bounced back to a position of relative strength under Ershad who exploited the development to his advantage in order to curb secularism and the Awami League. Ershad was followed by a general election which saw Begum Zia, President Zia's widow, becoming Prime Minister. This was a further opportunity for Islamist forces to gather in strength and stature and consolidate their position in Bangladesh society. But the 1996 general election brought an interregnum with the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the daughter of founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in power. The 2001 general election brought the BNP and Begum Zia back to power, but this time the really significant development was the graduation of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* to power, the third largest party in the present parliament with 17 seats and two ministers.

An issue that is yet to be settled satisfactorily is the extent of popular support that the 17 seats and two ministerships of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* represent. Apparently, the journey of the organization from the total disinheritance of the post-1971 period to the gradual return to home base and rise in strength through the good offices of Presidents Zia and Ershad till the current height was reached, can only be described as spectacular. Lintner discusses the issue in some detail, "It is impossible to determine how much support the Jamaat actually had in the 2001 election as it was part of an alliance whose various members voted for each other against the Awami League, but its 17 seats in the new parliament—and two ministers in the government—suggest a dramatic increase. Its youth organization, *Islami Chhatra*

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Shibir (ICS), is especially active. It is a member of the *International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations* as well as the *World Assembly of Muslim Youth* and has close contacts with other radical Muslim groups in Pakistan, the Middle East, Malaysia and Indonesia. One of its main strongholds is at the university in Chittagong, and it dominates the Deobandi *madrassas* all over the country, from where it draws most of its new members. It has been implicated in a number of bombings and politically and religiously motivated assassinations. On 7 April 2001, two leaders of the Awami League's youth and student front were killed by ICS activists and on 15 June 2001 an estimated 21 people were killed and over 100 injured in a bomb blast at the Awami League office in the town of Narayanganj. Two weeks later, the police arrested an ICS activist for his alleged involvement in the blast. A youngish Islamic militant, Nurul Islam Bulbul, is the ICS' current president and Muhammad Nazrul Islam its general secretary." Lintner notes that while both Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina had pledged during the 2001 election campaign all support to the global war against terrorism if they were elected to power and the Zia government continues to support the war, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* created, at the time the war in Afghanistan was on, a fund for "helping the innocent victims of America's war," and reportedly collected taka 12 million (\$ 210,000) which was to have been sent for relief to Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Not surprisingly, an important element in the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh is the role of *madrassas* which, to quote Lintner, numbers a surprising 64,000, divided into the *Aliya* (government-supported and controlled) and *Dars-e-Nizami* or Deobandi *madrassas*.¹¹ While the *Aliya* schools prepare students not only in Arabic and the Qur'an but also in modern subjects such as English, mathematics, science and history, the Deobandi schools continue with traditional subjects like Urdu, Persian and Arabic, thus rendering their students incapable of joining government and private sector jobs and eligible only for job in mosques or Deobandi *madrassas*. The Deobandi *madrassas* also generally attract students from poorer families, and thus qualify as recruitment centres for Islamic fundamentalist groups.¹² Since considerable foreign

remittances, mostly from Saudi Arabia, continue to not only propel but also flesh out the *madrassas* as well as mosques, future prospects are not exactly dim for their products.

The insidious manner of spreading Islamic fundamentalism is well reflected in the following developments which, though isolated on the surface, are actually interlinked and indicate the depth already attained by this malaise within Bangladesh. Over 3,000 night coaches travel every night from Dhaka to various destinations, and it is customary to play audio cassettes during the otherwise tedious journeys. It has been observed for sometime now that in-between popular cassettes, those of rabid fundamentalist and member of parliament Maulana Delawar Hossain Saidi spewing venom on secularism and advocating Islamic fundamentalism are also being played. Despite protests by passengers, the transport authorities express their inability to stop the practice, arguing that it is impossible to trace bus drivers and conductors who could well be influenced by the *Jamaat-e-Islami*.¹³

After 20 years of marriage, a couple was forced into divorce, which neither desired, by village elders and the local mullah in a Narail village. It appears that Motaleb Mollah(45), father of four, was very angry one day at his wife Hamida Begum (35) and declared *talaq* (Islamic divorce, pronounced thrice by the husband and notified by the *qazi*, Islamic judge, to be effective). The elders and the mullah insisted that the couple were thereafter divorced and could no longer live together. When hamida, who had been ordered sternly to leave the village immediately, could not bear to be separated from husband and children, took shelter in a cousin's house within the village, the latter was promptly declared ostracized. Speaking to *Bhorer Kagaz* on 20 January 2001, both husband and wife maintained that they wanted to live together but could not do so due to the opposition of the village elders and the mullah.

In the river-bound Barishal district, there is a certain *pir* (Islamic holy man) who has declared that neither grown-up girls nor women teachers should be allowed to enter school premises in the area under

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his influence. Newspaper reports suggest that he apparently wields power enough in the area to ensure that even the government bows to his diktat. The *pir* himself runs a major *madrassa* adjacent to his sprawling ancestral property, where no girls and women are allowed in though girls related to him are fortunate to be permitted to go through school. Unfortunately for the *pir*, while his own *madrassa* faithfully implements his order, there is a government primary school right opposite where as many as 124 girls are co-educated along with 108 boys. Unable to stop girls from joining the school, the *pir* has ensured that no female teacher is employed at the school. Thus, even though the government policy requires that every primary school has a minimum of two female teachers, this particular school has none. The school had once tried to defy the *pir* and appointed a female teacher. But the *pir* prevented the teacher from joining and threatened that if such defiance was repeated, he would force the closure of the school.¹⁴

While Bangladeshi nationalism has replaced Bengali nationalism of the pre and post-liberation period, the Bengali language as practised in the country has undergone a major interpolation of Arabic, a trend which seems to be gathering momentum, liberalism and secularism are being attacked from various quarters. Sometime back, the Bangladesh Film Censor Board (FCB) refused to issue a censor certificate to *Matir Moina* (Clay Bird), saying in a letter to director Tareque Masud that the film should not be shown in public as it contained “religiously sensitive material.” A large group of intellectuals and film and theatre personalities condemned the action, saying that the FCB’s decision was a great surprise “to those who have seen the film.” The *Daily Star* described the film as a “sensitive portrayal of a multi-cultural and multi-religious Bangladesh.” “Given that the film depicts *madrassa* education in a very sensitive light and presents the socio-religious contradictions in any society trying to adjust to the modern world, one is left wondering what caused the ire of the censors. In fact, the film takes a very sympathetic view of *madrassa* education which contrasts radically with the western depiction of Muslim religious education in such institutions.” According to the intellectuals who rose in protest against

the banning of the film, Matir Moina provides a nuanced and subtle view of Islam, rather than the stereotyped Islam-bashing of western media. “We believe that the FCB has committed a grave error by banning this film. This action will only give ammunition to those who portray Islamic culture as rigid and unyielding. Rather than protecting religious sentiments, the ban will only stifle open discussion and progressive change.” The fate of another film *Lal Salu* (The Red Cloth) was somewhat different. This film was approved by the FCB and yet could not be exhibited in Sylhet district where the police stepped in and stopped its shows. Director Tanveer Mokammal alleged, “I believe that a major nexus is behind the ban. Fundamentalists, as it is, dislike our work. They are angry at films on the liberation and alternative cinema.”¹⁵

These superficially isolated incidents and developments clearly indicate the widening space for Islamic fundamentalism, which is edging secularism and liberalism out. Unfortunately for Bangladesh and its neighbours, even this particular trend is not an end by itself but is part of a larger and deeper churning of forces inimical to peace and social, economic and political advancement. While the famous cry of Bengali nationalism *Joi Bangla* (Victory to Bengal, both being Bengali words) was replaced by *Bangladesh zindabad* (Long live Bangladesh, zindabad being Persian), Pakistan’s infamous ISI resumed its operations with the active cooperation of Bangladesh’s Directorate General of Field Intelligence during the Zia regime, and the country absolutely consciously started to cut its moorings to India and the Soviet Union and began to grow close instead to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and China.¹⁶

In conclusion, the tenacity of liberalism and tolerance in Bangladesh must be recognized. Islamic fundamentalism, however, is quite definitely growing. The number of its adherents is still numerically insignificant, but what worries the international community is the obvious organizational skills along with larger resources that fundamentalist groups are apparently able to lay their hands on, and this is definitely worrisome. The presence of small arms is also increasingly noticeable;¹⁷ and, human rights are being violated, at times with impunity. A culture of violence is emerging and many young

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fundamentalists are armed. The increasingly larger role being played by the *Jamaat-e-Islami* in consolidating and spreading religious fanaticism and the role of Deobandi *madrassas* in this sphere are equally noticeable. All these are worrying the international community fighting global terrorism, for the seeds of virulent fundamentalism and terrorism lie in these relatively minor developments of today.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Mahmadul Basar, writes in *Bhorer Kagaz* newspaper dated 27 April 2002: “Is Bangladesh a moderate Muslim country? A foreign minister has praised Bangladesh as a ‘moderate Muslim country.’ A foreign newspaper has commented, ‘Bangladesh is about to lose its liberal Muslim character.’ I ask the question, ‘What does moderate Muslim country mean?’ ‘Moderate’ is a universally applicable word. It has no religious connotation. Is India called a ‘moderate Hindu country?’ Is mainland China a ‘moderate Buddhist country?’ Are the USA and UK called moderate Christian countries? Then why the epithet of moderate Muslim country for Bangladesh? Mother tongue and motherland are in no circumstances religious words; these are words without any religious connotation whatsoever. The liberation war of 1971 was a freedom struggle and not a *jihad* (religious war); it was a political movement to get freedom from the communal state of Pakistan, based on the two-nation theory, to found a secular Bangladesh.”
2. While Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia defends the inclusion of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* in her government as honouring a pre-poll commitment, the following despatch in *Dainik Janakantha*, 22 April 2001, lays bare how the fundamentalist organization exploited the electoral alliance to its advantage, “The fundamentalist group is advancing in the 1975 style. At the grassroots level, leaders and cadre of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* are moving away from the *Jamaat-e-Islami*. They are even openly criticizing the policies pursued so long by the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and are at the same time praising the Awami League government. It is learnt that *Jamaat-e-Islami* leaders and cadre have been specifically instructed to develop and sustain intimate relations with their counterparts in the Awami League. As a direct fallout of this policy, *Jamaat-e-Islami* elements have succeeded in joining the Awami League in the Cox bazaar area.” While this was one aspect of the subterfuge employed by the *Jamaat-e-Islami* to advance its cause, the following report in the same newspaper a year later (30 May 2002) records how the fundamentalist group had advanced at the expense of its major ally, the BNP, “The rise of Chhatra Shibir (the *Jamaat-e-Islami*’s student wing) in Dhaka’s educational institutions has begun to worry BNP policy makers. The latter are extremely worried over the frightening rise of Islami Chhatra Shibir in educational institutions of Dhaka including Dhaka University. Since the formation of the coalition government, Shibir has increased its membership from five per cent to eight per cent in educational institutions in

the last seven months. Intelligence reports suggest that if Shibir is able to continue to grow at such a rate, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* would become a major threat to the BNP. Before the general election, Shibir had no existence in any Dhaka institution except Dhaka University. It began to grow with the BNP-affiliated Chhatra Dal. Interestingly, Shibir has clearly grown at the expense of the Chhatra Dal.”

3. Haroon Habib, “Khaleda Zia assails foreign media”, *The Hindu*, Delhi edition, 19 February 2003.
4. *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001*, the Office of the Coordinator for Counter Terrorism, Washington DC, 21 May 2002.
5. Press Trust of India report in *The Hindu*, Delhi edition, 10 February 2003.
6. Bertil Lintner, “Is religious extremism on the rise in Bangladesh? *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, May 2002.
7. *The Times of India*, Delhi edition, 17 February 2003.
8. *Mukto Mona* (Free Thinkers), a platform for secularists in Bangladesh, runs a website <http://www.mukto-mona.com> recording relevant developments.
9. *Ibid.*
10. M.G. Kabir, *The Changing Face of Nationalism: The Case of Bangladesh* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1994), p.201.
11. “Immediately after the crackdown by the Pakistan armed forces, on 26 March 1971, the Islamic parties and supporters of Pakistan tried to establish cooperation with the Pakistan authorities. As part of this plan, peace committees were formed on 9 April. The *Jamaat-e-Islami* and some ulemas formed the core of the committees, with the Muslim League, *Nizam-e-Islami* and *Krishak Sramik Party* joining them. Soon after the committees opened liaison offices in various parts of Dhaka city in the offices of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*. In association with this move at the centre, local branches and student organizations under their influence formed action groups to counter the guerrilla attacks and execute the supporters of the liberation struggle. The main groups were *Razakars* (Abbas Ali Khan started organizing this group in Bogra), *Al Badr* (Islami Chhatra Sangha, the student wing of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* formed the nucleus of this group and madrasa students were its members) and *Al Shams* (the student wing of the Muslim League, responsible for the massacre of students in Chittagong). The three groups, having organized the executive wing of the peace committees, cooperated with the Pakistani army and led terrorist actions against the supporters of the liberation, both in urban and rural areas. No less than 5,000 execution yards were their creation for butchering the sympathizers of the liberation struggle.” See, Abanti Adhikari, “Fundamentalism in Bangladesh: Currents and Cross-Currents (1972-99)”, *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, vol.4, nos. .3-4, July-December, 2000, pp.127-128.

Describing the aftermath of the liberation of Bangladesh, the author writes: “In November 1971, Golam Azam went from Lahore to East Pakistan to join a meeting of the central committee of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*. He appealed to all

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Pakistanis to forget their political affiliations and unite against the Bangladesh freedom movement. After Bangladesh gained freedom on 16 December 1971, Golam Azam was deprived of the citizenship of Bangladesh and (he) came over to settle in Pakistan. Many other fundamentalists also took shelter in Pakistan, waiting for a chance to revive fundamentalism in Bangladesh.” Golam Azam, it may be recalled, was declared a prime traitor to Bangladesh and sentenced to death at a people’s court.

12. The most prestigious Islamic university in the Indian subcontinent, *Dar ul Uloom*, is located at Deoband, Saharanpur district, Uttar Pradesh state of India, and its leaders strongly supported the Indian nationalist movement led by the Indian National Congress. Interestingly but by no means suprisingly, the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, which was founded in 1941 by Maulana Abul Ala Maududdi and was nurtured mainly by the Deobandi *madrassa*, the popular name for the university, went to the extent of alleging that “the demand for a separate state based on modern selfish nationalism amounted to rebelling against the tenets of Islam.” See, M.G Kabir, *op.cit*, p.99.

The irony of history, however, came to the fore with the establishment of Pakistan, where the Deobandi *madrassas* gradually came to play the foremost part in strengthening and spreading the concept of the Islamic state with a rigid implementation of the *Sharia* law. Thus, the irony was complete when over the years the Deobandi school, which was at one time synonymous with liberal Islam, came to be identified as the breeding ground for Islamic radicalism and fanaticism. In time, the Deobandi *madrassas* in Pakistan played a major role in educating and preparing the future *Taliban* for their devastating experiment in Afghanistan. Even the dreaded Talibanization of Pakistan, which appears to have halted somewhat in its track in the aftermath of the 11 September period, has been mainly the handiwork of the Deobandi *madrassas*. And now in Bangladesh, the process seems to be continuing, with Deobandi *madrassas* far outstripping government-aided and run *madrassas* in the job of attracting and motivating boys from poor families.

13. *Dainik Janakantha*, 11 February 2001.
14. *Bhorer Kagaz*, 11 January 2001.
15. *Dainik Janakantha*, 16 May 2002.
16. President Zia had enumerated seven factors as the basis for Bangladeshi nationalism, which were territory, people irrespective of religion, Bengali language, culture, economic life, religion and the legacy of the liberation war of 1971. M.G.Kabir explained that Zia’s concept was a scheme “to simultaneously consolidate feelings of nationhood, provide a series of symbols for unifying the country, contribute to the enthusiasm with which nation-building activities are pursued and, ultimately, maintain the identity and integrity of Bangladesh as a nation-state independent of India.” See, Kabir, *op.cit*. pp.196-197.
17. Bangladeshi newspapers reported the following incident on 18 January 2003: Approximately 50,000 illegal weapons including several hundred sophisticated weapons like AK-47, AK-56, M-16 besides a large stock of amunition, are in the

possession of the underworld in Chittagong. However, no official confirmation is available. The arms are expected to be used in the forthcoming Union Parishad elections in Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar and three hill districts. A large number of these arms were legally held but were not surrendered when the government issued a directive to that effect in November 2002. Lintner mentions that in the mid-2001, the estimated number of illegal arms in Bangladesh was 250,000 of which only 5, 481 were recovered during a crackdown in the lead-up to the general election in October 2001. In early 2002, three leading local human rights groups reported that a total of 258 people had been murdered in March alone of which 39 were political killings. In February, the number of murders was 336, including that of a journalist, according to the Institute of Democratic Watch.

When one talks about the potentially volatile situation in Chittagong district with thousands of illegal weapons in hiding, one should also take cognizance of the fact that much of the violence in the Chittagong-Cox's Bazaar area emanates from the thousands of Rohingya refugees, a Muslim community of Myanmar. In 1991, over 250,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh claiming religious persecution in their country. More than 20 camps were set up for them near the border south and east of Cox's Bazaar. Most of these refugees were gradually repatriated under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) but an estimated 20,000 have stayed back in two camps between Cox's bazaar and the border with Myanmar, which is heavily mined on the Myanmar side to prevent smuggling and cross-border guerrilla activities. There are other Rohingyas as well, living outside the UNHCR camps. In the midst of Bangladesh media allegations in the early months of 2001 that the Rohingyas were involved in drug and gun-running and in fundamentalist activities, the government clamped down on them in January. The Rohingya leaders stoutly denied the allegations. The truth appears to lie somewhere in-between, for there is evidence that Islamic militant groups have been active among the disenfranchised Rohingyas and that some of them were recruited for *Al-Qaeda* operations in the Taliban-held Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden is on record having indicated the involvement of Rohingyas in terrorist activities. Intelligence reports suggest that Rohingyas also form a substantial part of the cadre recruitment for *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (HUJI), which was formed in 1992 and said to have been funded by Osama bin Laden. Links between the HUJI and other Bangladeshi militant groups and *Al-Qaeda* were exposed when the leader of the *jihad* Movement in Bangladesh, the umbrella organization to which the HUJI belongs, Fazlur Rahman signed the official declaration of the *jihad* against the United States on 23 February 1998.

Appendix

Islamic Organizations in Bangladesh

Jamaat-e-Islami (J-e-I) is the oldest Islamic political party in the Indian sub-continent and was originally averse to the concept of a theocratic state, but has played the role of a potentially fundamentalist Islamic organization in both wings of Pakistan since 1947. Its rabid fundamentalist philosophy was exposed when the party in the then East Pakistan sided with Pakistan in 1971 against the liberation movement. Public wrath forced its entire leadership to flee for safety to Pakistan. Its political fortunes, however, turned for the better when two military rulers of Bangladesh, Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman and Gen. Ershad, invited its leaders, including the then Amir Gholam Azam, a declared war criminal, back in order to fight the secular-democratic forces led by the Awami League. Since then its fortunes have risen steadily, culminating in emerging as the third largest party in the 2001 general election, capturing 17 seats in the new parliament and being rewarded with two Cabinet posts, including the crucial Agriculture ministership for its present Amir Motiur Rahman Nizami. The party is unapologetic about its ultimate goal of converting Bangladesh into an Islamic state in a phased manner. While the party has not been accused of direct involvement in any terrorist activity, it has, nevertheless, clearly emerged as the main inspiration for the swift spread of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in the country since its advent to power two years ago.

Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) is the youth-student organization of the J-e-I and reflects its rapid growth during the two years that the parent organization has been sharing power in the Begum Zia government. While the J-e-I maintains its political credentials, the ICS is clearly a militant organization and is reportedly involved in various terrorist activities, including major bomb outrages and political assassinations. Its international militant connections are well-documented and it is aligned with two international Islamic militant organizations, International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth. Its cadres are actively involved in inter-actions with

militant groups in Pakistan, Middle Eastern and South East Asian countries, notably Malaysia and Indonesia.

Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), established in 1992 with the direct patronage of Osama bin Laden (if Bangladeshi newspapers are to be believed), has grown into the most important militant Islamic organization in Bangladesh and sustains itself by drawing recruits from the mainly rural poor students of Deobandi *madrassas*. It was also the most vocal supporter of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan and used to describe its members as “Bangladeshi Taliban” until it became politically inconvenient to do so. It has been accused of having been involved in the persecution of feminist writer Taslima Nasrin and forcing her to flee the country and of direct involvement in the assassination attempt on one of the most respected intellectuals, Shamshur Rahman, as well as the stabbing of a senior journalist (in November 2000) for making a documentary on the plight of Hindus and an assassination attempt on the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (in July 2000). Bangladeshi newspapers also reported at the time that in the early 1990’s Bangladeshi diplomats stationed in Saudi Arabia helped Pakistani Islamic terrorists to escape the kingdom (where a crackdown was on at the time under US pressure) and enter Bangladesh, as did other Islamic fundamentalists fighting in Afghanistan when the going became rough for them. The phenomenal growth and strength of the HUJI is said to be owing considerably to the contributions made by these Arabs and non-Arabs who found shelter in Bangladesh. The HUJI belongs to the umbrella organization, The Jihad Movement in Bangladesh, whose leader Fazlul Rahman was one of the signatories to the 23 February 1998 declaration of a *jihad* against the United States ; the other signatories were Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri (the deputy leader of Al-Qaeda and leader of the Jihad group in his native Egypt), Rifa’i Ahmad Taha alias Abu-Yasir (Egyptian Islamic group) and Sheikh Mir Hamzah (secretary of the *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan*). The Indian government has accused the HUJI of involvement in the January 2002 attack on the American Center in Kolkata and in a series of bomb blasts in Assam in the mid-1999.

Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) , a relatively minor Islamic party but a constituent of the four-party alliance led by the Bangladesh National Party now in power.

Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), a splinter group of the original **Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO)** and closely aligned with the J-e-I and ICS in Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar. It ran training camps for its Rohingya cadre in the early 1990's in the region close to the Bangladesh-Myanmar border where ICS members also learned guerrilla warfare techniques.

Jamiyatul Mujahedin (JM), a completely unheard-of group, came into notoriety with the series of bomb blasts that rocked the northern parts of the country during 2002 . Police investigations showed that the group had been able to spread its tentacles far and wide through its *madrassas* for boys and girls, training centres run for women and hostels for boys and girls in different towns. Its funding was not satisfactorily explained, but the authorities appear to have backpedalled the investigations and no punitive measure seems to have been taken to cut the organization to size.

Al-Qaeda, whose presence is stoutly denied by the government, remains active, according to South Asian intelligence reports. There was acute embarrassment for the Begum Zia government in September 2002 when the police in Dhaka arrested seven so-called aid workers working ostensibly for the Saudi Arabian Al Haramain Islamic Institute. The men were found to be natives of Libya, Algeria, Sudan and Yemen belonging to an organization that initially came to Bangladesh to help the Rohingya refugees but gradually shifted to the running of Islamic centres throughout the country. The Saudi Arabian institute is now widely recognized as a front for al-Qaeda. Incidentally, the arrests yielded no subsequent result and the matter was apparently suppressed by the authorities.

Students of Madrassa (SM), again a shadowy organization that suddenly came into prominence when unidentified Muslim scholars, grouped under the SM banner, claimed responsibility for the December

7, 2002, serial bomb blasts in Mymensing killing 18 persons and injuring 300 others. The claim also mentioned that the unknown group had received Taka one lakh (100, 000) each for carrying out the blasts at four cinema halls, the reward having come from an unnamed Islamic students organization. While a police and a judicial probe were begun on the bomb blasts, Awami League leaders and cadre were arrested on allegations of involvement. Bangladesh was rocked by 27 bomb blasts between November 21 2000 and December 7 2002, accounting for a total of 89 deaths and 787 persons injured in the roughly two-year period.

South Asian intelligence reports say that a little after the fall of Kandahar in the late-2001, hundreds of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters managed to flee through the Pakistani port of Karachi and landed in Chittagong. The fighters were escorted to sequestered camps in the Ukhia area south of Cox's Bazaar, the fact having come to light after the local people reported seeing armed foreigners in the company of some Bangladeshis. Further intelligence reports say that **Jemmah Islamiah**, spearheading the Islamist movement in South-East Asia, also sent its cadres for shelter in the same camps. While initially the camps close to the Bangladesh-Myanmar border were run for training Rohingya rebels, they are now said to be run by the HUJI.

DISCOURSES ON MINORITY REPRESENTATION

The Case of Hindu Religious Minority in Bangladesh

Haridhan Goswami and Zobaida Nasreen

The concepts of 'majority' and 'minority' appear frequently in the discussion on inter-group relations. Scholars in studying majority-minority relations emphasized a number of concepts so far. Some scholars¹ considered prejudice, some² discrimination and some³ both assuming a linkage between them. Though these studies provided significant insight to understand majority-minority relations, the studies paid less attention to analyze how the majority constructs the minority through language and exercises power by this. This linguistic representation of the minority by the majority becomes discourse since it can exercise power.

Foucault argues that discourses are much more than linguistic performances. They are players of power, which mobilize rules, codes and procedures to assert a particular understanding. The construction of knowledge takes place within these rules, codes and procedures. They organize reality in specific ways that involve particular epistemologies. According to Foucault discourse needs to be studied archaeologically and genealogically so that we can uncover their effective formation through non-discursive practices.⁴ For the matter of discourse, Foucault said, it was not to show that the mechanisms or process of the language were entirely preserved in it; but rather to reveal, in the density of verbal performances, the diversity of the possible levels of analysis; to show that in addition to methods of linguistic structuration (or interpretation), one could draw specific descriptions of statements, of their formation, and of the regularities proper to discourse.⁵

Generally, prejudicial attitude proceeds to the discourses. Allport defined prejudice as an avertive or hostile attitude towards a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is, therefore, presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group.⁶ Whenever groups are formed in society, the group members

may bear pre-judgment towards the other group members in society. Pre-judgments become prejudices, Allport argued, when they are not reversible when exposed to new warrantable knowledge⁷. Therefore, members from the majority may have prejudice towards the minority and vice versa. From prejudicial attitudes, the members of one group represent the other(s) in different ways by using different epithets. In addition to using epithets, the majority represents the minority by constructing some negative images that originate from stereotype. The epithets and negative images become discourses whenever they exercise power. Although the minority, having stereotype and prejudice in mind, bears various negative images and uses many epithets to represent the majority, these cannot be discourses. Epithets used only by the majority and the negative images they bear to represent the minority become discourses as these can produce and exercise power. Throughout the world, we observe usage of a wide variety of epithets by powerful group(s) towards the powerless group(s). For example, the Polish use *Reptiles* for Ukrainians, the Germans use *Polish Cattle* to the neighbours to the East, *Prussian Swine* is used for the Germans by the Poles and the White use *Nigger* to label the Blacks.⁸

Table 1
Percentage Distribution of Population by Religious Composition in Bangladesh (1901 to 1991)⁹

Year	Muslims	Hindus	Others
1901	66.1	33	0.9
1911	67.2	31.5	1.3
1921	68.1	30.6	1.3
1931	69.5	29.4	1.2
1941	70.3	28	1.8
1951	76.9	22	1.1
1961	80.4	18.5	1.1
1974	85.4	13.5	1.1
1981	86.7	12.1	1.2
1991	88.3	10.5	1.2

N.B. 'Others' include the Buddhists, Christians and animists or nature worshippers.

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Bangladesh, predominantly a Muslim country, has a population of 134 million.¹⁰ The religious composition of the people of Bangladesh is as follows: Muslim: 88.3%, Hindu: 10.5% and others (Buddhist, Christian etc.) 1.2%. The relative numbers of Muslims and Hindus have changed over the years. Table 1 shows the numerical changes in the population of different religious groups in Bangladesh from 1901 to 1991. In Bangladesh, religion bears a special significance because religion plays a very important role in people's everyday lives. Among the various religious groups, Muslims and Hindus had antagonistic relations in different eras in history and have had prejudice towards each other. Members of both groups in Bangladesh have their own epithets to label members of the other. Hindus, from their prejudices, use the epithets of *Yavan*, *Masla* etc. to indicate Muslims. On the other hand, the members of the majority group (Muslim) use various epithets such as *Maalaun*, *Maalu*, *Haanud*, *Deda* etc. to indicate the Hindu minority people. These epithets result from the prejudicial attitude of the Muslims towards the Hindu minority. The usage of epithet is one of the several discourses that the majority (Muslim) constructs to represent the minority (Hindu). Although Hindus in Bangladesh (the member of minority group) have various epithets to address Muslims (members of majority), these epithets can not be discoursed because the minority, being at the bottom of the power structure of the society, seldom can use these epithets to address the majority in face-to-face interaction. Therefore, the minority can not exercise power over the majority by applying these epithets in an interactive situation. Due to this reason, the epithets used by the majority to represent the minority will only be the concern of this article.

This article, *firstly*, identifies the prevailing discourses that the majority uses to represent Hindu minority people in Bangladesh. This section deals with the discourses on minority representation from two angles, i.e., representation through using epithets and constructing stereotypical images. *Secondly*, the article describes the strategies that the minority applies to cope with these discourses. Lastly, the paper analyzes how the majority exercises power over the minority through these discourses.

MINORITY GROUP DEFINED

The term 'minorities' carries with it a myriad of complex dimensions, each of which addresses a particular aspect of the majority-minority dichotomy and each of which is very dependent on the context in which the observations are made. Various theoretical models have been developed in the past to explain the social, economic and political interaction between minority and majority within a given society. They generally start with the premise that a stratification and hierarchy of groups exist within a given society. The strata may be defined on the basis of numeric representation, through power relations or by some combination of the two. Schermerhorn describes a power paradigm that uses relative size and direct access to power to determine whether groups in a society are dominant or subordinate.¹¹ According to Schermerhorn's characterization, if a group has both size and power it is the 'majority'. If it has size but does not have power, he classifies it as the 'mass subjects'. If it has power but does not have size, Schermerhorn assigns the label 'elite'. The group that has neither size nor power is classified as a 'minority'¹². Although this definition of minority cannot be applied universally, it matches with the situation of religious minorities in Bangladesh. There are several religious minorities in Bangladesh that are both small in size and have almost no connection to the power structure. Among the minority groups, Hindu religious group has been selected in this study because this group is the largest in number among religious minorities in Bangladesh and compared to other minority groups, Hindu religious minority has had more antagonistic relations with the majority group (Muslim).

Since this study seeks to analyze the existing discourses to represent the minority by the majority, the setting in which the groups in interest have chance to interact frequently with each other is very important. There should be respondents in the study area from both minority (Hindu) and majority (Muslim) who interact with each other in their everyday lives. Considering this point, two villages, named B and G (pseudo name), have been selected for the study. In village B there are 133 households, whereas in village G, the number of households is

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211. Among 133 households in village B there are 116 Hindu households, whereas in village G there is only one Hindu household. However, there are many Hindu households next to village G with whom Muslims in village G interact more frequently. Respondents for the majority and minority group for this study have been selected from village G and B respectively. The respondents have been grouped into three socio-economic status (SES) categories.¹³

Household heads were chosen as participants in the study because they exercise most of the power in the house, control property, especially land and their socio-economic status influences mostly the lives of other family members in the house. Two separate lists of the households (Muslim household in village G and Hindu household in B) were prepared first. From the lists, 110 households (Muslim) from village G and 40 households (Hindu) from village B were selected randomly for the study. The household head of each of the selected household was interviewed for the study. Social survey method was chosen for the study. Specifically, data was collected from the majority and the minority by utilizing structured and semi-structured interview schedules respectively.

EPITHETICAL DISCOURSES

Representation of Hindu minority in Bangladesh has come through a long way though its form has been changed from time to time. This representation may be either direct and/ indirect and is reflected in various agencies of mass media, stories, novels, poems, daily conversation etc. Various writings of medieval period provide evidence regarding the representation of Hindus by the Muslims in history. Muslims used *Maalaun*, *Kaafir* etc. to address Hindus¹⁴. The neglected attitudes of Muslims to the beliefs, customs and idolatry of Hindus was evident in *Rasul Bijoy* (Victory of the Prophet) by Jainuddin, *Hanifer Digbijoy* (Hanifa's World Conquest) by Shabirid Khan, *Jaikum Rajar Lorai* (The Battle of King Jaikum), by Syed Sultan, *Sonavan* by Fakir Garibullah, *Jaiguuner Kissa* (The Story of Jaigun) by Syed Hamja. The origin of Hindus was reflected negatively

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in *Nabi Bangsho* (Descent of Prophet) by poet Syed Sultan. The poet said,

*Je Sob Nurur Dekhi Pronam Na Koila
Kaafir Hoiya Sei Jogote Janmilla
Aage Na Pronomiya Je Poshate Pronomila
Hindu Kule Janmi Puni Musolman Hoila
Je Aage Pronam Kori Pache Na Korilo
Musolman Kule Janmi Kafir Hoilo*¹⁵

[One who did not show reverence to Allah, he or she had been born as *Kaafir* in the world. One who did not show reverence at first but did so later, he or she, though born as Hindu first, became Muslim again. One who showed reverence at first but did not later, he or she, though born as Muslim first, became *Kaafir*.]

The attitude of the poet towards idolatry was expressed in the following way:

*Shashrete Likhche Sei Mabei Moroti
Nischoy Hoibo Taar Noroke Bosoti.*¹⁶

[It is written in the *Shastra* (the sacred book) that one will be placed in hell that worships idol]

The opinion regarding the holy book, *Vedas*, of Hindus was expressed in the following way:

*Vedas Shastro Srijiya Na Koila Kon Kaaj
Raakho Niya Chariveda Samudrer Maj.*¹⁷

[The sacred book *Vedas* does not work well. Throw away the four *Vedas* into the middle of sea.]

Islam opines that these quotations of poet Syed Sultan regarding Hindus are not separate matters¹⁸. All these reflect the negative attitude of Muslims towards Hindus in the medieval period. Such type of representation can also be found in the colonial period. Several writers of the colonial period presented Hindus in very derogative way in their writings. One of the prominent writers in Bengali literature, Mir Mossaraf Hossain, described Hindus as very *Cunning* in his one poem

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titled *Bortoman Musolman Samajer Ekkhani Chitra* (A Description of Present Muslim Society) published in 1897. Hossain said,

*Prothomete 'Choch' Hoye
Poshe Hindu Roye Roye
Musolman Zaminder Ghare
Crome Chepe Boshe Ghare
Saddhya Nai Matha Nare
'Fal' Hoye Fare Chere Pore*¹⁹.

[Hindus, firstly, entered into Muslim Zamindars' house in a very submissive way. Gradually they spread their networks in such a way that they become harmful to shelter provider.]

After the end of colonial period, representation of minority took a new turn when India and Pakistan emerged as two separate independent nations after partition Pakistan was considered as the homeland of Muslims and India for Hindus. Though two countries were born on the basis of religion and a large number of Hindus migrated to India before or after the partition, there was a considerable number of Hindus left in Pakistan. These Hindu minority people became the target of prejudice and discrimination in their daily lives. When the Hindu leaders tried to voice the grievances of the minority, they were often attacked by the ruling party and the press for their alleged "divided loyalty" or disloyalty to Pakistan.²⁰ The *Dawn* made a number of editorial comments against them as "deliberate recalcitrants."²¹ During Pakistan's rule, international politics was associated with minority representation. Minority Hindus were related to India as Hindus constituted a majority in India. The label 'agent of India' has been attached to the Hindus since that period.²² The same trend in labeling Hindu minority can also be observed even in Bangladesh when it got independence from Pakistan. In the research area one male respondent from middle SES said,

It was the time of our Durga Puja. I started for home from town by mishuk (a kind of transport on which three people, along with its driver can travel) after offering prayers in the temple. I did not wear traditional dress and ornaments. Therefore, it was

difficult to identify me as a member of Hindu unless somebody knew me personally. There were two people from the majority along with me in the mishuk. When we started, one of my fellows started talking to the other fellow: 'every year, Maalaun sons start what they call Puja. Hundreds of males and females run to the town in that period. Generally, one cannot realize that there are so many Hindus in the country. They have not received any lessons from the Liberation war though many of them were killed and tortured'. The other fellow supported him and added 'it was wrong not to kill all of them during the Liberation War. Following Indian culture, they make a statue with mud, gather together and address it Mum, Mum. Do they have any religion? It would be better, if all of them could be sent to India. (Case- 1)

Epithets may be applied in various ways. Laughing, aggression, teasing, joking etc. are only a few in this regard. The particular way of using epithet depends on the nature of personal relations between the majority and the minority. The SES of the minority also affects it. The collected data suggests that minority from middle and upper SES generally receives epithets from the majority in laughing and/ joking way. The majority also applies these epithets to classmates, friends or co-workers from the minority. The following statement reveals how epithet is used in joking way by close surroundings from the majority:

As far as I can remember, in high school when we gossiped together, some of our classmates from the majority used abusive epithets towards us in a joking way. The representation style was such that they were using it just for making fun, but they never considered whether we were taking it that way or whether we were hurt by it or not (Case-2)

Epithets are used aggressively if the minority belongs to the lower socio economic status. The aggressive manner of using epithet is observed in the following statement collected from a fisherman from lower SES:

One day in the evening, I took the fish that I caught from the nearby bodies of water to a village market for sale. A customer (previously known) from majority group came to

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me and asked, "Hei Haanud son, what's the price of your fish?" I became very angry for the way of his addressing but I tried to control my anger, as I could do nothing. I hiked up the price more than usual due to my anger with him. Understanding this, he replied, "Haanud son, which of your fathers from India will buy fish from you on such a high price?" Fearing negative consequences, I did not dare to tell him anything more. Finding no reply from me, he left the place'. (Case-3)

Epithets are sometimes used to tease minority in public places. When somebody from minority passes through a place, the nearby people from majority sometimes start talking among themselves and utter abusive epithets seeing nearby minority people. They do not use epithet directly towards the minority. But they talk about it among themselves in such a way that minority people can hear it. A 35-year old small businessman from middle SES reports it in the following way.

It was evening, after the general election in 1996. I, along with some other neighbors from the minority was returning home from town after shopping. We were crossing a tea stall located next to our village. We saw from a close distance that some people from the majority were gossiping in the tea stall. As we were passing by the tea stall, I heard one of the members from majority talking loudly seeing us; "All Haanuds were packed together and they gave vote in favour of boat (a symbol of a major political party). Otherwise, it would have never won in the election." We passed the place pretending that we had not heard their discussion. (Case-4)

STEREOTYPICAL DISCOURSES

Stereotype is an aspect of mental process. It is a fixed idea that accompanies the category or particular group. The stereotype acts both as a justificatory device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group, and as a screening of selective device to maintain simplicity in perception and in thinking. Stallybrass defined stereotype as "an over simplified mental image of (usually) some category of person, institution or event which is shared, in essential features, by large members of

people... Stereotypes are commonly, but necessarily, accompanied by prejudice, i.e. by a favorable predisposition towards any member of the category in question.”²³. The majority in Bangladesh has various stereotypical images for the minority. These images reflect how the majority represents the minority in their cognition. These stereotypes regarding minority become discourses when they exercise power on minority.

Table 2
Attitude of the Majority towards
Stereotypical Discourses on the Minority

Stereotypical Discourses on the Minority	Attitude of the Majority			Total
	Disagree	Agree	Uncertain	
Hindus are fonder of India than Bangladesh	9 (8)	93 (85)	8 (7)	110
Hindus are the most selfish.	16 (15)	88 (80)	6 (5)	110
Hindus break promise easily.	35 (32)	57 (52)	18 (16)	110
Hindus are Hypocrites.	5 (4)	93 (85)	12 (11)	110
Hindus consider India as their motherland.	5 (4)	102 (93)	3 (3)	110
Hindus dispatch money and valuable goods from Bangladesh to India.	11 (10)	91 (83)	8 (7)	110
Hindus have no religion in real sense.	24 (22)	83 (75)	3 (3)	110

Source: Field Survey, 2002.

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

The attitude of the majority toward stereotypical discourses is easily understood from Table 2. Among the stereotypical discourses, the discourse of *Hindus consider India as their motherland* is found as the most popular discourse in the study. Almost all (93%) the respondents from the majority support this discourse. The other most popular discourses are *Hindus are fonder of India than Bangladesh* and *Hindus are Hypocrites*. Most of the respondents (85%) agree with these two discourses. The discourses of *Hindus dispatch money and valuable goods from Bangladesh to India* and *Hindus are the most selfish* can be graded as the third and fourth popular discourses

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respectively. The fifth most popular discourse found in the study is *Hindus have no religion in real sense*. The least popular discourse in the study is *Hindus break promise easily*. In spite of less popularity, more than half (52%) of the respondents agree with this discourse. Other than the discourse of *Hindus break promise easily*, there is almost no disagreement among the participants from the majority for the other discourses. Though small in number compared to the attitude type of 'disagreement' and 'agreement', the highest number (relative to other discourses) of respondents has expressed the attitude of 'uncertainty' for this discourse. The tendency of the majority to relate 'India' with 'Hindu' is clearly evident in the discourses. These discourses express prejudice of the majority and help maintain a distance between minority and majority. Though these discourses are prevailing in society orally, these verbal expressions can exercise power over the minority.

The stereotypical discourses available to represent Hindu minority in Bangladesh can be grouped into two broad categories. Some discourses reflect the personality characteristics and some the general characteristics of the minority. These two types of stereotypical discourses are analyzed below:

Personality Characteristics of Minority

The three stereotypical discourses (in Table 2) that represent the personality characteristics of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh are *Hindus are the most selfish*; *Hindus break promise easily* and *Hindus are Hypocrites*. The negative representation of the personality characteristics of the minority by the majority can also be observed in many other studies. Katz and Braly²⁴ listed the following traits that the respondents of their study ascribed for the Blacks: superstitious, lazy, happy-go-lucky, ignorant, musical. Surveying stereotyped beliefs concerning the Black, Yong²⁵ reported a long list some of which characterized the Blacks as of inferior mentality, primitive morality, emotional instability, lazy, religious fanaticism etc. The image of the majority regarding the negative personality characteristics of minority

is also reflected in the interaction between majority and minority in their everyday lives. The experience of a minority male banker from upper SES is as follows.

In order to buy a piece of land in town and build house there, I wanted to take a loan of 9,45,000 taka from a bank. I had to prepare a mortgage deed with the bank through the District Sub-Registrar Office of Land. Along with my advocate, I went to the Sub-Registrar to make an agreement. My advocate took all the papers to the Sub-Registrar to get his signature. I followed the advocate. The advocate gave all the papers to the Sub-Registrar. Seeing my name he said to the advocate, "How does a bank approve such a huge amount of loan to a minority? Who is the loan seeker?" Then the advocate showed me. The Sub-Registrar was not ready to see me there. He was very surprised to see me there. Seeing me there face-to-face, he signed all the papers. As I had occupational resources, I managed it without any problem. But I have seen many minority people, while working in a bank facing difficulty in getting a loan from a bank'. (Case-5)

The questions of the Sub-Registrar in above quotation reflect how a member from the majority distrusts the minority. This distrust may be connected with other representations, i.e. *Bangladesh is not the homeland for Hindus, They may go to India anytime, They are not trustworthy* etc. regarding the Hindu minority. The Sub-Registrar did not know the minority member personally. Even he did not see him earlier. Without knowing him, he raised his doubt which reflects the majority image of the minority.

Relating Hindu Minority with India

India has become the part and parcel in the case of Hindu minority representation in Bangladesh. Various factors in history, e.g., partition of the Indian sub-continent on the basis of religion, mass out-migration of Hindus from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to India etc. are only a few that might influence the cognition of the majority. Though these factors in history do not have any direct connection with the Hindu minority in Bangladesh, the influence of these factors is still evident in the cognition of

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the majority. The three discourses relating Hindus with India found in the study are: *Hindus are fonder of India than Bangladesh*, *Hindus consider India as their motherland* and *Hindus dispatch money and valuable goods from Bangladesh to India*. The reflection of these stereotypes in everyday lives of interaction between majority and minority can be observed in many situations. The statement collected from an interview with a forty year old married woman from the middle SES is as follows:

One day I went to a shop in town to buy some cosmetics items. As I am married, I was dressed in sari, conch and vermilion. These were enough to identify me as a member of a minority religious group. I searched for some items in the shop and wanted to buy some of them. But I decided not to buy one item though I selected it first to buy. So when I returned the item to its place, one sales person tells me, 'Didi (Sister), this item is from your country and very good'. I was so surprised to hear the words 'your country'. I asked him what he wanted to mean by these words. He simply replied, "Your country, India". I told him that I was born in this country, my forefathers also were born here so how I did become a citizen of India? Then he replied, 'Didi (Sister), it's our country. As you're Hindu, your country is India'. (Case-6)

Having stereotype in mind, the sales person from the majority tried to motivate the minority person to buy an Indian product hoping that the customer from the minority might like India as well as the product of India. There were products from various countries in the shop. Without showing these items, the sales person indicated only the Indian product. The seller also identified the customer as the citizen of India observing her dress that reflected her religious affiliation.

Treating minority as scapegoat is also observed in the study. The stereotypical belief that *Hindus dispatch money and valuable goods from Bangladesh to India* reflects how the majority treats the minority as scapegoat. The majority blames the minority for the poor economic condition of the country by arguing that they transfer money and other valuable goods to India. It is also heard from the majority Muslim that *if Hindus have two taka they try to deposit one taka in India*.

Religion of Hindu Minority

Most of the respondents from the minority (82%) acknowledge that they have found their fellow members from the majority to criticize the religion, rituals and practices of the minority. The general places of discussion found in the study are bus, train, road etc. In private places such as working place, or friend circle, the minority becomes victim of this type of discussion. Organizing religious discourses by the majority under the leadership of a priest is a common picture of rural Bangladesh in the winter season. The respondents reported that in some cases, the main speaker sometimes, discusses about the religion, rituals and practices of the minority in an objectionable way in order to attract the audience. One male respondent from middle SES reports,

Especially in the winter season, you'll find at least one big gathering once a week organized by rich families in villages. Sometimes, there is an announcement regarding such a gathering and religious priests are invited to deliver sermon on religion. Hundreds of people from the majority gather to listen such lectures. In some cases, the speaker starts a discussion about other religions in an objectionable way mentioning, Hindus have no religion. They worship idols. So, they are infidels..." As in most of the cases, a loudspeaker is used for this purpose, so one can listen to it from a far distance clearly at night. This type of discussion is sometimes tape recorded and played in buses. So when a member of the minority travels in a bus and listens to some objectionable discussion about the people and practices of his or her own religion, then definitely he or she feels bad psychologically. (Case-7)

The lecture of the speaker from the majority in a public gathering indicates that the majority can easily construct the image of the minority in society. As it is spread in the public place, it can affect human cognition quickly for a long distance. It is a discourse that exercises power in an informal way by affecting the cognitive level of the majority.

COPING STRATEGY

According to Feagin middle-class strategies for coping with discrimination range from careful assessment to withdrawal, resigned acceptance, verbal confrontation, or physical confrontation. Later action might include a court suit.²⁶ Gardner reported 'blocking' as a coping strategy for women dealing with street remarks²⁷. In this strategy women just ignore the discrimination and continue with the interaction. Feagin and Sikes in *Living with Racism: The Black Middle-Class Experience* argue that the personal coping strategies which blacks use to counter discrimination are: (1) defensiveness; (2) over-achieving; (3) developing a healthy self-concept; (4) prayer; and (5) humor or laughter²⁸. Goffman in his famous book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* mentioned various strategies that stigmatized personal uses in face-to-face situation²⁹. One of the strategies is hiding stigma symbol. He mentioned changing of name as an example. Scott (1985) identified foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on as the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups³⁰. Silence (as resigned acceptance in Feagin,³¹ and blocking in Gardner³²), avoiding, pretending and laughing are the frequently adopted coping strategies by the minority in the present study.

The adoption of particular strategy by the minority to face discourses reflects the position of minority in the power structure. In some cases the minority takes the discourses as for granted. They think that, as minority, they have to hear this and consider the discourse as a normal issue. In this way the minority also legalizes the power of the majority. One respondent reported, "*It is natural that the majority will say this. They are powerful and we are powerless. We have to hear this because they are all in all*". Pretending to overlook is considered as a form of resistance in this study (case-4). Minority people sometimes cope with the discourses by taking it as a matter of joke or humor.³³ When there is no way to leave the scene or take any other strategy to face it, some respondents tend to laugh with it.

The statement of a 55-year female school teacher from middle SES is as follows:

In working place, you'll find sometimes that your co-workers from majority are discussing something about the rituals and practices of Hindu that is objectionable. In some cases the discussion will not be confined within them. They'll try to involve you in the discussion in various ways. You have no scope to avoid it; even you cannot seek justice for it from anybody. They are your co-workers, so you've to work with them from 9am to 5pm. So what one can do, especially if he or she is alone in this type of situation. You've to pretend that you never mind this type of discussion. Otherwise, they may enjoy it very much. So, taking it easy and joining their discussion by laughing is the only solution left. (Case-8)

There is a tendency of some respondents to hide their identities³⁴ to avoid the untoward situations. This strategy is mostly applied in public places. In some cases, the male respondents hide the traditional ornaments (*maala*, the wooden necklace) that he wears just to avoid receiving comments from the majority. As the physical appearance of both the majority and minority (Hindu) is the same, this strategy sometimes works well. In extreme cases, minority members avoid wearing traditional dress or ornaments (same as Goffman³⁵, when a physically handicapped rejects to use instrumental assistance to hide his or her stigma symbol). Some respondents have been found who prefer not to tell their real names in public places because these names are taken from Hindu religion and by these names they can be identified as minority members. Somebody likes to keep a neutral nickname and wants to be introduced with other people by this name. The statement of a 30-year old petty businessman from lower SES is as follows:

My mother gave me the maala (a necklace of wooden beads used generally by Hindu people) and asked me to wear it. She passed away. This is the only symbol, I'm bearing now from her. I did not wear it from religious point of view. But by seeing this, anybody can easily identify me as a member of minority. So, in public places, I like to hide it by keeping it inside my shirt so

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that nobody can see it. Another problem of mine is my name. As the name is related to Hindu religion, anybody can identify. That's why I've kept a neutral nickname of my own. In public places, I introduce myself by that nickname. When I'll have a child, I'll keep a neutral name of him or her so that none can identify him as a member of minority. (Case- 9)

Being silent (as resigned acceptance in Feagin³⁶ and blocking in Gardner³⁷) is found to be the most widely practiced coping strategies of minorities in this study. They think it as the best way to save themselves from further negative consequences. The argument of a male respondent from middle SES is as follows:

We're facing troubles everyday in many ways. It is not that one does not want to face it with all of his or her efforts. But what will happen ultimately? Can one seek justice from somebody for his or her everyday life problems? Then he or she will have to go to the village leader everyday. And what will one get in return of it? Justice! If one is lucky enough then, he or she may get it. So, what will be the ultimate result? Definitely, further repression. So, is not it better to be silent? At least one will be safe from the next negative consequences that may derive if any other strategy is adopted (Case-10)

DISCOURSES AND EXECUTION OF POWER

It seems, apparently, that the discourse is neutral and powerless. But the reality is that it produces power continuously and subjugates the minority in an indirect way. Representation is invariably political. It creates images, mostly stereotypical, which is definitely linked with power.³⁸ Discourse, as a tool of representation is, therefore, linked with power. It can be expressed through knowledge, language or text. Said noted that knowledge is not power neutral.³⁹ It, he added, is connected with economical, political and ideological power. To understand the power relationship between majority and minority in Bangladesh, we have to give concentration on the politics of knowledge. Said indicated how the general liberal consensus that “true” knowledge is fundamentally nonpolitical (and conversely, that overtly political knowledge is not true knowledge) obscures the highly if obscurely organized political

circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced.⁴⁰ Analysis of this paper suggests that power is not concentrated in the state apparatus only.

According to Foucault, power is productive and simply a negative force, the sole function of which is repression⁴¹. He treats power as a net like organization of relationship running through the whole social body, it exists only in action and must be exercised. He saw power as being produced and reproduced through constant social interaction, from many different directions. Foucault described power as ‘not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with, it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society’⁴². Influenced by Foucault’s analysis, Kondo stated that power is ‘creative, coercive and extensive with meaning’⁴³. Power is not simply embedded in structural relations-maintained by force of one kind or another-but also constituted through language and everyday practice⁴⁴.

In Bangladesh, one can observe the application of power on the minority by the majority through language that acts as discourse. The dormant intention of the majority in the case of representing the minority by using epithets is repression. The way of addressing the minority by the majority by using epithets “*Hei Haanud son, what’s the price of your fish?*” (case no-3) shows the power of the majority. The fish seller could not reply to the person from the majority using epithets that the minority generally uses for the majority. His failure to give counter reply to the person from majority using epithets, reflects his submissive position in an interactive situation with the majority. The coping strategy used by the minority also reveals the power of language. His vulnerable condition in this interactive situation is also reflected when he said, “*I became very angry for the way of his addressing but I tried to control my anger, as I could do nothing*” (case no-3). When the member of the majority labeled him with India saying, “*Haanud son, which of your father from India will buy fish from you on such a high price?*” (case-3), the fish seller remained silent. This is the power relationship that is a symbol of repression. The repression may be either psychological or social or economical or political or a combination of the three. When

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the majority uses epithets to the minority, the minority feels psychologically weak. The situation creates psychological stress on the minority.

Power is exercised in everyday life through construction of stereotypical images regarding minority people. All negative images such as '*Hindus are the most selfish*'; '*Hindus break promise easily*' and '*Hindus are Hypo crates*' are used to represent the powerless minority group in the society. Members of the majority thus discriminate against the minority. The images get social form as the majority shares these with their fellow group members. Extending discrimination to the minority by the majority bearing negative attitudes in their mind indicates the execution of power by the majority. Teasing the rituals of the minority people is a way of exercising religious power. When the member of the majority declared "*Hindus have no religion. They worship idols. So, they are infidels and they are enemy of us and our religion*" (case 7), the member of the minority undergoes psychological stress and finds himself/herself as a powerless group in the society. This stereotypical image becomes discourse as it affects the minority psychologically.

State patronization plays the key role to the representation of the minority. The inclusion of the words *Bishmilla ar Rahman ar Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) at the outset of the constitution and the declaration of Islam as the state religion in the constitution of Bangladesh make the majority feel superior psychologically over the minority. The majority having superiority in state exercises its power in many ways. This situation makes religious minorities feel more insecure and powerless. It also turns the relationship between the majority and minority into two opposite poles.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have tried to analyze the power relationship between the majority (Muslim) and the minority (Hindu) in Bangladesh through some discourses. The discourses produce knowledge and exercise power indirectly. Language plays a crucial role over discourses since the discourses are practiced verbally. Usage of epithets to

represent the minority by the majority is one form of discourse. The majority uses the epithets in various ways, e.g., laughing, aggressive tone, teasing etc. The adoption of particular way depends on the nature of individual level relationship between the majority and the minority and the socio-economic status of the minority people. There are some stereotypical images of the majority regarding the characteristics of minority people. These images also exercise power over the minority. In most of the cases, the stereotypical images connect the Hindu religious minority in Bangladesh with India. These images present the personality characteristics in a negative manner. Being silent, laughing, pretending, avoiding, and mild verbal protest are the most widely used strategies that the minority undertakes to cope with the discourses in an interactive situation. Such type of strategies they most frequently adopt also reveals their vulnerability in the society.

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SITUATION OF MINORITIES IN BANGLADESH

Ruchira Joshi

Few if any countries on this planet are without ethnic and religious minorities and few can point to a history entirely free of conflict involving them. Almost all States have one or more minority groups within their national territories, characterized by their own ethnic, linguistic or religious identity, which differs from that of the majority population. Because of its diverse population, the South Asian region has long been a theater of conflict between religious and ethnic communities. The minority problem in South Asian countries can be attributed to the process of uneven economic development, stagnation and colonial and pre-colonial heritages and processes of state and nation building before and after the attainment of independence. Almost all the South Asian States were under the British rule during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

Throughout their rule, the British consciously exploited Hindu-Muslim antagonisms in a divide-and-rule strategy. At first the British favoured the Hindus, distrusting the Muslims from whom they had seized the power.¹ But when nationalism took hold among the Hindu middle class in the late 19th century, the British tried to win the support of well-to-do Muslims by offering them more government jobs and educational opportunities. This strategy culminated in the 1905 Partition of Bengal, creating a new predominantly Muslim province of East Bengal with Dhaka as its capital. The partition exacerbated Hindu-Muslim tension, and, although revoked six years later, it cast a shadow on the events to come.

The creation of Pakistan contained the germs of discord between “West Pakistanis” and Bengalis. Initially, the population of East Bengal supported the creation of Pakistan, and departure of the British. Islam, which was to serve, as the unifying force in this country was understood, interpreted, and exercised in different ways in these two

separate wings. The declaration of Urdu as the official language of Pakistan created discontent among the East Bengalis. The Bengalis viewed the Pakistani elite's attempt to impose Urdu as the state language as a design to prevent them from full participation in the state rule. Meanwhile, the economic colonization and the expropriation of wealth of East Bengal by the West Pakistani ruling elite began, the export earnings of which were used to finance the development of Karachi, the major commercial city of West Pakistan, and the Punjab, the dominant province of West Pakistan. East Bengal was the world's largest producer of raw jute, which was Pakistan's main foreign exchange earner. This economic disparity soon became the major cause of conflict between East and West Pakistan.

Bengali nationalism grew because the Pakistani ruling elite refused to recognize the demands of the Bengalis for political participation in the state and for the economic self-rule of East Bengal. The crisis reached its climax following the 1970 elections, when the Awami League won a triumphant electoral victory. The failure of the Pakistani ruling elite to meet the demands of the Awami League program led to a political deadlock. The military regime refused to accept the 6-point program out of fear that it would reduce the military budget and dismantle the West Pakistani business interests in East Bengal. In order to prevent the Bengali political leadership from acquiring power, military action was resorted to which culminated into a full-fledged war.

The military attack on the Bengalis transformed the movement for attaining political self-rule into a national struggle of the Bengalis, irrespective of their political affiliation, religious preference, or class background. With the help of the Indian army the independence of Bangladesh became a reality in 1971.

MINORITY RIGHTS

What does the term minority imply? The difficulty in arriving at an acceptable definition lies in the variety of situations in which minorities exist. Some live together in well-defined areas, separated from the dominant part of the population, while others are scattered throughout

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the national community. Some minorities base a strong sense of collective identity on a well-remembered or recorded history; while, others retain only a fragmented notion of their common heritage. Grammatically the word minority is a compound of the Latin word 'minor' and the suffix 'ity'. It means *inter alia* the smaller in number of two aggregates. The most commonly used description of a minority in a given State can be summed up as a non-dominant group of individuals who share certain national, ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which are different from those of the majority population.

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, minority is defined as "a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group living within a larger society. When used to describe such a group, the term carries with it a web of political and social implications".² According to the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, a minority is defined "as a group of people differentiated from others in the same society by race, nationality, religion or language who both think of themselves as a differentiated group with negative connotations. Further, they are relatively lacking in power and hence are subjected to certain exclusions, discriminations, and other differential treatment."³ According to *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, the term minority is defined "as a population group with a characteristic culture and sense of identity occupying a subordinate political status."⁴

The formal attempt to define minority began in 1977 when the UN Sub-Commission appointed Francesco Capotorti to study the implementation of the principles set out in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with a special emphasis on the concept of minority. In 1977 Francesco Capotorti's study report put forward the following definition of minority:

A group non-numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state in a non-dominant position, whose members being nationals of the state possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language.⁵

J. Deschenes formulated subsequently a definition of minority and presented it to the UN Sub-Commission in 1985. He defined a minority as “a group of citizens of a state, constituting numerical minority and in a non dominant position in that state, endowed with ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics, which differ from those of the majority of the population, having a sense of solidarity with one another, motivated, if only implicitly, by a collective will to survive and whose aim is to achieve equality with the majority in fact and in law”.⁶ However, the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, established by the Commission on Human Rights, could not arrive at a universally acceptable working definition of a minority group, which could be used comprehensively to address the issue of protection of vulnerable groups in given societies.

Under the League of Nations the following concept of minority as ‘community’ or ‘nationality’ came to be clarified by the Permanent Court of Justice (PCIJ) in the Advisory Opinion on the Greco-Bulgarian Community case in July 1930:

By tradition...the “community” is a group of persons...having a race, religion, language and traditions...preserving their traditions...in accordance with the spirit and traditions of their race and rendering mutual assistance to each other.⁷

Essential principles for the protection of minorities were clearly laid down by the PCIJ in the case of the Minority Schools in Albania stating that attempts should be made to ensure the possibility of staying peacefully with the population which differs from the majority in race, language or religion, while at the same time preserving the characteristics that distinguish them from the majority. For this purpose two things were regarded as necessary:

The first to ensure that the nationals belonging to racial, religious or linguistic minorities shall be placed in every respect on a footing of perfect equality with the other nationals of the state. The second is to ensure for the minority elements suitable means for the preservation of their racial peculiarities, their traditions and their national characteristics.⁸

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The most widely-accepted legally-binding provision on minorities is Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.⁹

Article 27 of the Covenant grants persons belonging to minorities the right to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic identity, or a combination thereof, and to preserve the characteristics, which they wish to maintain and develop. Although Article 27 refers to the rights of minorities in those States in which they exist, its applicability is not subjected to official recognition of a minority by a State. Article 27 does not call for special measures to be adopted by States, but States that have ratified the Covenant are obliged to ensure that all individuals under their jurisdiction enjoy their rights; this may require specific action to correct inequalities to which minorities are subjected.

The only United Nations instrument which addresses the special rights of minorities in a separate United Nations document is the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The text of the Declaration, while ensuring a balance between the rights of persons belonging to minorities to maintain and develop their own identity and characteristics and the corresponding obligations of States, ultimately safeguards the territorial integrity and political independence of the nation as a whole. The principles contained in the Declaration apply to persons belonging to minorities in addition to the universally recognized human rights guaranteed in other international instruments.

The Declaration grants following provisions to persons belonging to minorities:¹⁰

- a) Protection, by States, of their existence and their national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identify of minorities

- within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity (Art. 1);
- b) States shall adopt appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve those ends (Art 2);
 - c) the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion and to use their own language in private and in public , freely and without interference or any form of discrimination (Art. 2.1);
 - d) the right to participate in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life (Art. 2.2);
 - e) the right to participate in decisions which affect them on the national and regional levels (Art. 2.3);
 - f) the right to establish and maintain their own associations (Art. 2.4); and
 - g) the freedom to exercise their rights, individually as well as in community with other members of their group, without discrimination (Art. 3)

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights reaffirms the obligation of States to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discriminations and in full equality before the law in accordance with the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.¹¹ The Vienna Declaration further urges states and the international community to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in accordance with the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Measures should be taken to ensure their full participation in all aspects of the political, economic, social, religious and cultural life of society and in the economic progress and development of their country.¹²

ETHNIC MINORITIES IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is a nation in South Asia bordered by India on the west, north, and east; Myanmar (Burma) on the extreme southeast; and the Bay of Bengal on the south. Having a population of 126.90 million (1999 census), 98 per cent of which are Bengalis,¹³ Bangladesh is ethnically speaking a homogeneous nation. However, there are about 2,50,000 Biharis and less than 1 million tribals.¹⁴ According to the 1991 census, the percentage distribution of population by religion composed of Muslims- 88.3 per cent, Hindus- 10.5 per cent and others (Buddhist, Christians and others)- 1.2 per cent.¹⁵ However, for the same period the percentage distribution of tribal population by religion put the figures for Muslims 18 per cent, Hindus 21.2 per cent and Buddhists 36.7 per cent.¹⁶

At the time of the 1981 census Bangladesh's tribal population consisted of 897,828 persons being just over 1 per cent of the total population.¹⁷ But as per the 1991 census, the tribal population of Bangladesh has been recorded as 12,05,978 persons, that is about 1.13 per cent of the total population in 1991.¹⁸ The tribals live primarily in the Chittagong Hills and in the regions of Mymensingh, Sylhet, and Rajshahi. The majority of the tribal population lives in rural settings, where many of them practice shifting cultivation. Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of tribal population of Bangladesh by sex and residence as recorded in 1981 and 1991 population census.

Table 1
Distribution of Tribal Population of Bangladesh
by Sex and Residence, 1981-1991

SEX	1981		1991	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Both Sexes	82.0	18.0	86.7	13.3
Male	81.6	18.4	86.4	13.6
Female	82.3	17.7	87.0	13.0

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh 1999* (Government of Bangladesh: Planning Commission, 1999)

According to the 1991 census, the tribal population of Bangladesh alone accounted for 1.2 million thus constituting 1.13 per cent of the country's total population. Proportion of rural and urban population in 1981 was recorded as 82.0 per cent and 18.0 per cent respectively as against the corresponding proportion of 86.7 per cent and 13.3 per cent for the country as a whole in 1991.

Most of the tribal people are of Sino-Tibetan descent and have distinctive Mongoloid features. The four largest tribes in Bangladesh are the Chakmas, Marmas (or Maghs), Tipperas (or Tipras) and Mros (or Moorangs). Tribal groups in other parts of Bangladesh include Santhals in Rajshahi and Dinalpur, and Khasis, Garos, and Khajons in Mymensingh and Sylhet regions.

Most Chakmas are Buddhists, but some practice Hinduism or animism as well. Of Burmese ancestry, the Marmas regard Burma as the center of their cultural life. Marmas are mostly Buddhists. The Tipperas are nearly all Hindus and account for virtually the entire Hindu population of the Chittagong Hills. They migrated gradually from the northern Chittagong Hills. The Mros, considered to be the original inhabitants of the Chittagong Hills, are mainly agriculturists who lived on hilltops and often forfeited their villages. They have no written language of their own, but some of them can read Burmese and Bangla scripts. Most of the Mros claim to be Buddhist, but their religious practices are largely animistic. The Garos have their traditional religion, which is a form of animism. But the majority of them have now been converted to Christianity. The Santhals retained their traditional religion, which is based on belief in spirit (animism). However, they have been influenced by Hinduism and some of them have been converted to Christianity.¹⁹

THE CHAKMA PROBLEM

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in southeastern Bangladesh is landlocked between northeastern India and the Arakan hills of Burma. Covering an area of approximately 5,093 square miles, about 10 per cent of the total land area of Bangladesh, it is inhabited by the

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Chakmas, Marmas, Tripuris, Khyangs, Lushais, Khumis, Chaks, Murungs and Bawms. The people are collectively known as Jummas for their *Jum* or shifting cultivation. The area is relatively rich in natural resources, with fruit growing there in abundance. There is also timber, bamboo and gas, and in recent years possibilities for oil exploration have also been pursued actively.

The East India Company annexed the CHT in 1785 after a guerrilla war of resistance for twenty five years by the Chakmas. In 1860, the CHT was made an integral part of British India. In 1881, the British enacted the CHT frontier police regulations, according to which a native police force was raised with tribal constables under British officers. This tempered tribal opposition to British control and gave subjects an impression of being involved in the administration of their territory. An important administrative reform introduced by the British at the turn of the century was the CHT regulation of 1900, popularly known as the hill tract manual.²⁰ According to this regulation, the district of CHT was divided into three circles: The Chakma, the Bohmong, and the Mong. Each circle was placed under the jurisdiction of a tribal chief who was responsible for revenue collection and managing internal affairs. In 1920, the manual was amended and a new administration was formed under the CHT (Amendment) regulation 1920 in which the district was declared an excluded area. It remained independent of general administration even in the 1935 Government of India Act. Throughout the British colonial period the 1900 Act functioned as a “safeguard” for the Jumma people, prohibited land ownership and migrations of non-indigenous peoples in the CHT, and also provided full local autonomy to the Jumma peoples and respect for their practice of customary laws, traditional ways of life and land rights (common ownership).

The roots of the conflict lie in the partition of India and the policies followed by both the Pakistani and Bangladeshi governments. After the partition in 1947, the Chittagong Hill Tracts as part of Pakistan, lost its special status and autonomy under an amendment to the Pakistan Constitution in 1963. Pressure on land cultivation had in the past led

to the migration of a large number of non-tribal people from other parts of Bangladesh into the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The government since 1960s actively encouraged this process.

The origin of the problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is believed to be the completion of a dam at Kaptai near Rangamati during 1962-67, under the Pakistani administration. At least 54,000 acres of settled cultivable land, mostly farmed by the Chakma tribe, were lost in 1957 when the government began the construction of the Karnaphuli hydroelectric project. Over 400 square miles of land with 25 per cent of the human settlement and large areas of arable land were inundated with far-reaching affects on the economy and life-style of the tribal people there. Some 100,000 people lost their homes and prime agricultural lands, though the dam produces only 0.5 per cent of the total energy supply and three per cent of the total commercial supply of the country.²¹

Apart from uprooting thousands of people, the Kaptai project has also created other adverse impacts, such as, changes in the occupational structure, loss of forest resources (a staggering 75 square kilometres of reserve forest area and another 600 square kilometres of unclassified forest areas went into the lake), decline in wildlife and cattle, and scarcity of safe drinking water.²² According to the Chittagong Hill Tracts District Gazetteer, 1975, the lake devoured a total of 54,000 acres of land under cultivation, while 21,522 acres of cultivable land were reclaimed by clearing of the forests.²³ In the Kasalong Reserve Forest under Baghaichari Thana alone, 100 square kilometres of forests were destroyed to reclaim 10,000 acres of land for farming.²⁴

The job opportunities created by the project did not benefit the hill people, and the Kaptai reservoir has been a boon only to the Bengali fishermen.²⁵ Though compensation was provided to those displaced but it was inadequate. The Power Development Board is now considering a proposal to modify the Kaptai Dam and increase the water level in the Kaptai lake to 90 feet from the present 76 feet to implement its proposed Kaptai Hydro Power Plant units six and

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seven.²⁶ This is to increase electricity production by 120 megawatts. However, the hill people claim that a five feet rise in the water level will submerge nearly 30,000 acres of cultivable land.²⁷

The conflict has worsened because of the planned population transfers from the plains to the CHT. The population transfers were initiated during Pakistan administration when the Pakistani Government announced its intention to open up the area for economic development and encouraged poor Bengali families to settle there. After independence, in violation of the CHT 1900 Regulation, the government of Bangladesh sponsored a planned population transfer policy of non-indigenous people. The government viewed these transfers as necessary for the overall development of the country in view of the problem of population pressure and land resources.

In 1979, President Zia-ur-Rahman initiated a policy to encourage largescale transmigration of thousands of Bengalis to the CHT. The settlers were poor Bengali families who were allotted five acres of hill land or four acres of mixed land or 2.5 acres of wet rice land in addition to free transport to access the CHTs, and free rations and protection by the Bangladeshi armed forces. In 1979 and 1980, around 1,00,000 Bengalis were settled into the CHTs. Further in 1981, another 1,00,000 people entered the area, while additional 2,00,000 went between 1982 and 1983.²⁸

The situation was made more volatile by imparting the ethnic overtone to the CHT problem. The settlement process drastically altered the demographic make-up of the region by reducing the indigenous people to a near-minority in their ancestral homeland. Most importantly, it led to the dispossession of thousands of acres of lands belonging to indigenous people, which they are yet to recover. Meanwhile, the government-sponsored Bengali settlers continue to receive regular food grains from the government, a clear sign that their continued presence in the CHT requires financial subsidies.

The population of Bengali people in the region has steadily grown which has had a direct implication on political representation and the

protection of the land rights of the Chakmas and other tribal people. The artificially engineered demographic change saw a Bengali candidate from Khagrachari district being elected to parliament in the 1991 elections. His appointment as the Chairman of the CHT Development Board has now been condemned as a violation of the 1997 Accord, which provides that priority shall be given to “tribals” in the appointment of the Board’s Chairman.

Encouraged by the Bangladesh freedom struggle the Chakmas launched an armed movement for self-determination in 1973, after their demands for constitutional safeguards and autonomy were summarily rejected in 1972. In fact, in 1972, efforts were made by the Chakmas to try and engage the Bangladeshi government into a dialogue to sort out the issue. A tribal delegation called on the then Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for the acceptance of four basic demands. These demands included:

- a) autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, together with provisions for a separate legislative body;
- b) retention of the provision of the 1900 Regulation in the Bangladesh Constitution which allowed a form of self government; the continuation of the offices of the traditional tribal chiefs;
- c) a constitutional provision restricting amendment to the 1900 Regulation; and
- d) the imposition of a ban on the influx of non-tribals into the area.

These demands were rejected, and the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh made no provision for any special status for the Chittagong Hill Tracts. On 7 March 1972, Manobendra Narayan Larma along with his brother Bodhi Priyo Larma formed *Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti* (PCJSS - the Chittagong Hill Tracts People’s Solidarity Association). Its armed wing, *Shanti Bahini* (peace force) was also formed in 1972, although it did not become militarily active until mid-1970s when it began to attack military and paramilitary personnel and their bases in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, as well as non-

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tribal settlers, resulting in hundreds of deaths and the abduction of foreign nationals for ransom money. Violent army operations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts began in March 1980. The armed struggle continued for more than two decades until December 2, 1997 when a “peace” accord was signed between the indigenous people’s party, the *Jana Samhati Samiti* (JSS) and the Government of Bangladesh.

A direct result of the armed conflict was the excessive presence of military and paramilitary forces in the CHTs. The region was designated as a military zone since 1976 when civil administration ceased.²⁹ Hasan Shahriyar in his article stated that an estimated 37,000 troops and auxiliary forces were deployed to fight an estimated 7,000 insurgents.³⁰ The establishment of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) in 1976 for the CHT development deeply strengthened military occupation and development of military infrastructure in the CHT. The Chairmanship of the CHTDB is under the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Chittagong Cantonment who holds overall military command in the CHT. Since then, the military has been in charge of implementing all developmental projects in the CHT and also controlling the fund that came from the international aid agencies and donor countries for the CHTDB development projects. In fact, all development projects are financed either by international aid agencies or donor countries. However, a close examination of the CHTDB development projects reveals that more than 80 per cent of the CHTDB development budgets were spent on building a military infrastructure.³¹

Peace Initiatives under Various Regimes

Insurgency in the CHT continued with several unsuccessful and half hearted attempts at peace by the various regimes in Bangladesh. In August 1992, PCJSS declared a unilateral cease-fire for three months, which remained in force indefinitely until the signing of the peace accord in December 1997. The Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which assumed office in June 1996 following general elections, established a committee in October that year chaired by the

Ruchira Joshi

Chief Whip of the Bangladesh National Assembly to work out a solution to the conflict in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The first meeting between the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts and the leaders of the PCJSS was held in December 1996, which finally culminated into the signing of the Peace Accord on 2 December 1997. It was signed between the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts and the *Parbhatia Chhtagram Jana Sanghati Samiti* (PCJSS) in the presence of highest government authorities in Bangladesh. It required changes in Bangladesh law to enable the formation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council, a body with a range of autonomous powers.

However, at least three smaller political groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, namely the Hill Students Council, the Hill People's Council and the Hill Women Federation challenged the right of the PCJSS to be the sole representative of the tribal people and sign the accord on their behalf.

The CHT Peace Accord of 1997 ³²

The most salient feature of the CHT Peace Accord³³ is the establishment of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council “comprising of the Local Government Councils of the three Hill Districts”. It has 22 members and its tenure is five years. The Regional Council Chairman, who shall be a tribal and who has the status of a state minister, as well as other members of the Regional Council are elected by the members of the three Hill District Councils. Pending the formation of an elected Regional Council, its responsibilities are to be discharged by an interim Regional Council appointed by the Government.

Two thirds of the Regional Council members (12 male, 2 female) will be elected from amongst the tribal population with a special quota for each tribe. With regard to male members, there will be 5 from the Chakma tribe, 3 from the Marma tribe, 2 from the Tripura tribe, 1 from the Murong and Tanchowanga tribes, and 1 from the Lusai, Bwom, Pangkho, Hkumi, Chak and Kaiang tribes. One female member is

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elected from the Chakma and another from the rest of the tribes. One third of Regional Council members (6 male, 1 female) will be elected from the non-tribal population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts with members of each of the three Hill District Councils electing two male members of the Regional Council. There are no geographical conditions attached to the election of the non-tribal female member.

An agreement was also signed between the government and the refugee leaders on 9 March 1997 with an aim to take back the tribal refugees from India's Tripura State based on the 20-Point Facilities Package. In accordance with the said agreement, repatriation of the refugees started in 28 March 1997. The agreement stipulated that this process would continue and the JSS would provide all possible co-operation. The Task Force shall after determination, rehabilitate the internal tribal evacuees of three districts. After signing the agreement between the government and the JSS and its implementation which includes the rehabilitation of tribal refugees and internal tribal evacuees, the government shall start survey of land in CHT as soon as possible so that ownership of land is recorded and ensured. The government shall ensure providing two acres of lands to each landless family and the family which possesses less than 2 acres of lands, provided that lands were available, in the local areas. If requisite lands are not available then grove land shall be provided. It commits the government to take back in phases all temporary camps of the army and the Village Defence Force after the return of PCJSS members "to normal life".

Besides, reservation of quota system in government services and educational institutions for the tribals will continue and the government shall grant more scholarships for the tribal students in the educational institutions. The government and elected representative shall make efforts to preserve the distinct culture and tradition of the tribals providing necessary assistance. Finally, under the accord a Ministry for the Chittagong Hill Tracts is to be established with a minister appointed from the tribal people. An Advisory Committee comprising the Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chairman/Representative of the Regional Council, Chairman/representative of each of the three Hill District

Councils, the three members of parliament for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the three tribal chiefs, and three non-tribal members from among the permanent residents in the Chittagong Hill Tracts would be established “to lend support to this Ministry.”

The accord does not provide amnesty to the army and police personnel for past human rights violations. The amnesty is extended to the *Shanti Bahini* members who have surrendered their arms as well as to all PCJSS members. It provides for the withdrawal of all warrants of arrests, cases against them, court sentences passed as well as for the release of any of their jailed members.

The peace accord, like many other important issues in the country, has been caught in the cross confrontation of Bangladesh party politics. The government has not missed the opportunity to utilize it as a mark of its own success; and the opposition has not missed the opportunity to decry the accord as a mark of the government’s failure. The disaffected political groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts namely the *Pahari Gano Parishad* (PGP or Hill People’s Council), *Pahari Chattra Parishad* (PCP or Hill Students Council) and Hill Women Federation (HWF) consider the accord as having failed to respond to their aspirations of full autonomy. They argue that the accord has failed to “fulfill the main demands of the Jumma people namely, constitutional recognition to the national ethnic minorities of the CHT with guarantees of full autonomy, restoration of traditional land rights, demilitarisation of the area, and withdrawal and resettlement of the Bengali settlers in the plain land.”³⁴

It is true that the armed conflict between the two sides has receded. But peace is still a remote reality in the region. And this is largely due to manipulation as well as violation of the CHT peace accord by the successive Governments of Bangladesh. The Government continues to maintain double standards on the accord. It has been claimed by the Government that 98 per cent of the accord was implemented, and the CHT is now a “peaceful area”. But in reality, it is not the case. Most of the fundamental points of the accord remain unimplemented till today. Such points, among others, include effective

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enforcement of the CHT Regional Council and Hill District Councils Acts of 1998, settlement of land disputes between Jummas and Bengali Muslim settlers, rehabilitation of the Jumma refugees and internally displaced Jummas, withdrawal of the Bengali Muslim settlers and the “temporary” military and paramilitary camps from the CHT etc.

In its *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Bangladesh 2002* issued on 31 March 2003, the U. S. State Department says, “Tribal people have had a marginal ability to influence decisions concerning the use of their lands. The 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord ended 25 years of insurgency in the CHT, although law and order problems continued. The Land Commission that is to deal with land disputes between tribal individuals and Bengali settlers did not function effectively in addressing critical land disputes... Until 1985 the Government regularly allotted land in the CHT to non-tribal Bangladeshi settlers, including land that was claimed by indigenous people under traditional concepts of land ownership. This led to the displacement of many tribal groups, such as the Chakmas and Marmas. Bangladeshi inhabitants in the CHT increased from 3 per cent of the region’s population in 1947 to approximately 50 per cent of the area’s 1 million persons in 1997.”³⁵

Human Rights Violations in CHT

Human rights violations include massacres of tribal civilians, burning of their homes, arbitrary arrests, torture, extra-judicial executions and “disappearances” reportedly perpetrated by or with the connivance of the Bangladesh law enforcement personnel during the years of armed conflict in the CHT.³⁶ Among these incidents of massacres, the Kaukhali massacre on March 25, 1980 surpassed all previous records of brutalities committed against the tribesmen. It is further marked by the failure of Bangladeshi Government to bring to justice those responsible for these human rights violations. Since the signing of the accord on 2 December 1997, new political pressure points have added to the old tension between the tribal people and the settlers. These include the tension between the main tribal group,

PCJSS which signed the peace accord with the government and some smaller dissident groups who oppose the peace accord arguing that it does not go far enough.

Recent killings include the ones at Babu Chara Bazar in 1999. Three people were killed at Babu Chara Bazar in Dighinala Thana area of Khagrachari on 16 October 1999 in a clash between the army personnel and the Jummas.³⁷ The clash occurred after an incident in which Bangladeshi army personnel allegedly molested a Jumma woman. The woman shouted at him and the army personnel and another colleague who came to defend him were beaten by a number of young Jumma people. Subsequently, a contingent of army personnel came to the area aided by some 150 Bengali settlers and jointly attacked the Jummas in the Bazar. Two Jummas, Dipon Joyoti Chakma, a high school student, and Sukamal Chakma died of their injuries while the body of a Jumma man who was believed to have been killed during the attack was found in a nearby muddy paddy field.³⁸ Although the government is reported to have set up an inquiry into the incident, there has been no progress or outcome of the investigation.

On 26 December 1999, Professor Anu Muhammod, editor of *Meghbarta*, Bangladesh's first web magazine and few other academicians were arrested in Chittagong, where they were participating in a meeting organized by United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF), an organization of the indigenous Jumma peoples of the Chittagong Hill tracts.³⁹ Another attack was reportedly carried out on 12 December 1999 on Manin Chakma(37) alias Tarjen, son of Laxmi Chandra Chakma in Banghaltuli village in Baghaichari Thana area of Rangamati.⁴⁰ The gunmen surrounded his house, fired at him and shot him dead. Manin was reportedly an active member of PCJSS, a former *Shanti Bahini* member who along with others had surrendered his arms after the signing of the peace accord. According to PCJSS, he was the fifth victim of the attacks allegedly carried out by Prasit-Sanchoy groups since the signing of the accord.

Amnesty International believes that in an atmosphere of charged political distrust, it is imperative that every incident of alleged human

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rights abuse - be it attributed to the army, the police, the PCJSS or the dissident groups - is investigated by an independent, impartial and competent body to establish the facts and identify the perpetrators.⁴¹ The authorities should then ensure that those found responsible are brought to justice. Peace building in the Chittagong Hill Tracts requires lasting cooperation from all sections of the Bangladesh society, including government institutions, the ruling and the opposition parties, prominent personalities, parliamentarians, intellectuals, professionals and notables of local communities.

THE GARO TRIBE IN BANGLADESH

The Garo tribes of Bangladesh who form part of the larger collection of Garo people are inhabitants of the Garo Hills in greater Mymensingh and the Sylhet district in the northeastern Bangladesh. They belong to the same ethnic group as the Garos of the Garo Hills in Meghalaya, India. Right from Modhupur Forest, near Tangail to the west of Mymensingh district is the traditional homeland of the Garos. Modhupur is the third largest forest in Bangladesh and is famous for its towering fragrant *saal* trees (*Shorea Robusta*). The total population of Garos in Bangladesh is 68210.⁴² The Garo language is Tibeto-Burmese in origin and they have their traditional religion, which is a form of animism. But missionary efforts have converted the majority of them to Christianity. Garos are a matrilineal social formation centered around the family (*nokma*). The term *nokma* refers to land or the house. The Garos are involved in cultivation of pineapples, rice, potato and production and selling of rice beer.

Table 2
Garos Population by Country and District (1991)

Tribe	Bangladesh	Barisal Division	Khulna Division	Chittagong Division	Dhaka Division	Rajshahi Division
Garos	68,210	---	---	6,859	60,221	1,130

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Pocketbook Bangladesh 1999* (Dhaka, 1999)

The contact between the British and the Garos started towards the close of the 18th century after the British East India Company had secured the Diwani of Bengal from the Mughal Emperor. Consequently, all the estates bordering upon Garo Hills, which for all practical purposes had been semi-independent, were brought under the control of the British. Though political control had passed from the Mughals to the British, the latter, like Mughals, had no desire to control the estates or their tributaries directly. The Zamindars were not disturbed in the internal management of their estates. In fact, they were entrusted, as they had been by the Mughals, with the responsibility of keeping the hill Garos in check with the help of their retainers. Thus in the beginning, the intermittent conflict between the Zamindars and the Garos went on unabated until the situation deteriorated to the extent that the British were forced to take notice. This development led ultimately to the annexation of the Garo Hills in 1873.

The kin-ordered authority structure of the Garos underwent radical change when local chiefs were made agents of the central authority and for the first time in the history they became a minority⁴³ Yet at the same time the Garos were able to maintain much autonomy in managing their local affairs as a result of the colonial government's policy to revitalize and subordinate traditional forms of governance.

Under the British *Zamindari* system, the Garos could register low land under their own name and lease high land for cultivation. However, after partition Pakistani Government made several attempts to repeal these laws in order to do away with the special rights and privileges enjoyed by the tribe and to bring their land and social life under central control. For example, the enactment of the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 (EBSATA) excluded Garos from the special protection given to tribal groups by preferential legislature since the colonial period.⁴⁴ Then, in 1962, the government of Pakistan declared the Modhupur forest as a National Park, leading to control over thousands of acres of land cultivated and inhabited by the Garos. In several cases no compensation was paid to them. Tribals, who had fled to India during the 1971 war as refugees found that their

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land had been appropriated under the Vested and Non-Resident Property (Administration) Act (XLVI) of 1974.

Garos youths were persuaded in 1975 by Kader Siddiqui to join a rebellion on the promise of establishing a "Garos homeland." Though the rebellion was shortlived, a promising development to this uprising was that President Zia-ur-Rahman later proposed the setting up of the Tribal Cultural Academy in Birisiri and weaving centers at the *upazila* (local) level. In addition, seats were reserved for Garos in the Bangladesh Agricultural University and in medical colleges, and they were also recruited as Border Guards. In order to facilitate the Garos to air their grievances, Zia-ur-Rahman proposed a Tribal Welfare Association (TWA) to be set up in 1977. The TWA soon submitted fifteen demands, none of which were answered.

In 1984, the Forest Department of Bangladesh claimed a huge area of land that was in possession of the Garos and few other tribes in Modhupur Forest through a gazette notification for rubber plantation. The process of depletion of the natural resources allegedly accelerated when the Government undertook the program. The first phase of the project started in 1987 and an area of 15,000 acres of land was targeted in Aronkhola Union of Modhupur Police Station.⁴⁵ The Forest Department appropriated several acres of registered and prescribed land -the right of which is based on the length of occupation. After completion of the first phase, a second phase covering an area of 45,000 acres throughout the country was targeted.⁴⁶ When the indigenous peoples protested against such appropriation of land, they were subjected to harassment and serious human rights abuses including killings by forest guards.

In mid-1990, the *Upazila* (sub-district) Magistrate informed a correspondent of *Dhaka Courier* that "not a single case under the Amended Forest Act has yet been settled though 145 cases are pending in the Modhupur Upazila Court. The tribal people of Modhupur complained to the funding agency, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) about the immediate consequences and irregularities of the afforestation program.⁴⁷ An ADB official informed Modhupur Garo Aboriginal Unity

on 4 March 1994 that “As part of the Project framework, it was specifically agreed with the Government that no woodlot plantations will be established on permanently cultivated areas so as to avoid possible social conflict relating to competing land uses... The Bank has repeatedly reminded the Government of the specific commitment it had given as part of the Loan Agreement”⁴⁸

In 1994, the Government of Bangladesh started a massive afforestation program in order to fulfill the goal of the new Forest Policy of 1994 to move from present 8 per cent tree coverage to 20 per cent. Lands that have been held under title deeds from the Land Revenue Department and for which taxes had been paid regularly every year were confiscated without compensation. The Government stated that all these lands were gazetted under the Forest Act of 1927 as forestlands. The new Forest Policy applies even to areas, which have “lost the character of natural forests beyond recovery”, and which are said to be “lands unsuitable for sustained agriculture”.⁴⁹

The Government resorted to indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force to silence peaceful protests. On 10 July 1994, about 1,500 people of 10 villages, including three villages occupied by tribals for 70 to 100 years, gathered at Nalijani in Muktagacha Thana to stop the tree planting being enforced by about 70 forest guards and officials, the guards opened fire and injured seven persons.⁵⁰ The injured persons were arrested under the Anti-Terrorists Act. The ADB suspended finances and issued warnings to the Bangladesh authorities that conditions in loan agreement were being violated. Despite that the sufferings of the tribals in Modhupur have continued. The forest department until today has not offered any compensation for lands it has forcibly taken from the local people’s possession for the said afforestation program.

The total coverage of Modhupur Forest was reduced from 20,000 acres in 1970 to 10,000 acres in 1991.⁵¹ The members of the Garo tribe allege that the land appropriated for rubber plantations is being leased to private ownership as allegedly happened on a massive scale in the rubber plantation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The problem for

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the Garos is that only a few indigenous people actually have title deeds for high land in their possession, and the majority of them did not care to preserve tax receipts from the British period as a proof of their land ownership

Now, the government of Bangladesh is planning to develop an eco-park under about Taka 9 crore worth Modhupur National Park Development Project in the 3,000-acre heart land of the Sal forest complete with cottages and a lake. But it has sparked protests from indigenous people who live in the forest for ages and fear the project will destroy their peace.⁵² In the first phase, it is planned to cordon off the earmarked area with a 61,000-foot long wall. Indigenous communities mainly the Garos dependent on the jungle are protesting against the Bangladesh government's scheme to build a recreational center inside the ancient Modhupur forest, 80 miles northwest of Dhaka, which threatens to uproot them and desecrate the environment.

In July 2003, thousands of members of the indigenous Garo and Koch communities gathered at the site after construction workers built 3,000 foot of the wall.⁵³ A rally against the project in July 2003 succeeded in halting construction, albeit temporarily. "Once most of the forest becomes a recreational park, many will lose their homes and agricultural land," warns writer Sanjib Drong, who is also the General Secretary of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum (IPF), which is leading the protests.⁵⁴ "When this park opens, it will be full of noisy picnic goers and tourists. And a different type of economic activity will spring up in this area. This will destroy the traditional lifestyle and culture of the indigenous people," Drong maintains.⁵⁵

Since the Garo and Koch resist timber theft by unscrupulous employees of the Forest Department, the Department has in retaliation filed as many as 3,700 cases against them⁵⁶. In addition to connivance in timber theft, the Department has destroyed a part of the forest by planting alien species of trees like eucalyptus while another part of the forest has been cleared and converted into a banana plantation. Another fallout of such depredations is the attrition in animal life. The forest has

many species of deer and different types of monkeys and other small mammals, which will disappear if the park is built.

However, the government maintains that the Modhupur Sal forest is a spoiled land. According to Tangail DFO, out of 46,000 acres in the Tangail part of the Modhupur forest, 7,800 acres have been given out for rubber cultivation, 1,000 acres to the Air Force, 25,000 acres have gone into illegal possession and the Forest Department controls only 9,000 acres.⁵⁷ Most of the land that has gone into illegal possession is used mostly for production of pineapple, banana and cassava. Pineapple for cash has been a cultivation for decades. But pineapple business is now dominated by the Bengali traders. Banana plantation has expanded fast in the recent years. This new cultivation for cash is also controlled by the Bengali traders. Outsiders invest in both cultivations for big cash. The Adivasis are increasingly getting confined in their villages for expansion of pineapple, banana and commercial plantation of invasive species. Now as they see concrete walls raised close to their villages and blocking their walkways, they sense more trouble.

Insecurity stalked the indigenous people in their Modhupur forest homes after ruling BNP activists allegedly threatened them in the wake of violence that locals say is aimed at upsetting their movement against an eco-park. On 4 January 2004, locals claimed that Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists, armed with firearms and machetes, barged into the forest village of Jalchatra-Pachish Mile and threatened the indigenous people not to raise their voice against the park.⁵⁸ The threat came after a tempo of BNP activists ran into a procession of Garo people who were returning home from a rally in protest against the killing of Piren Slan who was killed on 3 January 2004.⁵⁹ Locals said the processionists damaged the tempo, 'taking the bait to create a religious divide' between the indigenous people who are predominantly Christian and the Bengali mostly Muslim. The Garo tribesmen declared a seven-day mourning programme, flew black flags atop houses, shops and other installations and barricaded the Dhaka-Tangail. The wall construction work was stopped.⁶⁰

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There are two things, which should be pointed out here. First, the plan to set up an eco-park may not be bad in itself, but the government could ill afford to ignore its impact on the lives of the local people. Participation of people in any development plan is an essential pre-requisite for its success. But that did not quite happen in Modhupur. The result is that the locals are viewing the government plan with great suspicion.⁶¹ Second, it is not clear why a development issue has been allowed to assume a political overtone.⁶² The activists of any political party cannot have a role in the plan of building an eco-park. Any intervention by political elements will only add to the worries of the affected people.

The rights of citizens are sacred that cannot be violated on the pretext of undertaking a development project. The development planners should not only admit but also insist on the point that all their endeavours will have a common goal - welfare of the people. There is absolutely no room for coercion in such matters.

A broader interpretation of customary and prescriptive rights under the Forest Act and the provisions of the ILO Convention No. 107 of 1957, ratified by Bangladesh, obliges the government to exercise its powers under the forest act with due consideration to customary and prescriptive rights.⁶³ The developments, which have taken place in international law since 1957, as well as in the situation of indigenous and tribal peoples in all regions of the world, have led to the adoption of a new Convention No. C 169 at the Indigenous and Tribal People's Convention held in 1989. Bangladesh has not yet ratified this Convention. The new Convention stresses the maintenance by the indigenous and tribal people of their separate identities, and their involvement in decisions about their economic and cultural development. Bangladesh has not observed the 1994 as a year of the Indigenous Peoples as was declared by the United Nations. On the other hand, it has categorically maintained that there were no Adivasis or indigenous people in Bangladesh.⁶⁴ The debate continues whether the ethnic minorities are Adivasis or migrants.

HINDU MINORITIES IN BANGLADESH

The Hindu population, mostly Bangla speaking people are the biggest religious minority community in Bangladesh and are scattered all over the country. The areas with most Hindu concentration are Barisal, Khulna, Faridpur and Jessore. The highest proportions of Hindus to Muslims in Bangladesh live in the city of Comilla, close to the border of Tripura, near India.

The census documents published by the Bangladeshi government point to the vanishing Hindu population. Fifty years ago in 1941, Hindus constituted 28 per cent (Table No.3) of the total population. The census of 1991 shows that Hindus now constitute only 10.5 per cent of the total population (Table No.3). Evaluation of government statistics of 50 years, from 1941 to 1991, indicates a large drop in the figure for Hindus. On the other hand, the Muslim population has increased from 70.3 per cent in 1941 to 88.3 per cent in the 1991 census. (Table No.3)

Table No. 3
Percentage Distribution of Population by Religious Communities (1901-1991)

Census Year	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Christians	Others
1901	66.1	33.0	-	-	0.9
1911	67.2	31.5	-	-	1.3
1921	68.1	30.6	-	-	1.3
1931	69.5	29.4	-	0.2	1.0
1941	70.3	28.0	-	0.1	1.6
1951	76.9	22.0	0.7	0.3	0.1
1961	80.4	18.5	0.7	0.3	0.1
1971	85.4	13.5	0.6	0.3	0.2
1981	86.7	12.1	0.6	0.3	0.3
1991	88.3	10.5	0.6	0.3	0.3

Source: Government of Bangladesh, *Analytical Report of Population Census 1991*, Volume 1, Dhaka, May 1994, p.103.

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The partition of Bengal in 1947 left six million Hindus in the Indian state of East Bengal and thirteen million Hindus in East Pakistan.⁶⁵ The existence of Hindu population was reflected in the 80-member strong Constituent Assembly of Pakistan whereby of the forty-four members from East Pakistan, thirteen were Hindus. In the first general election to the legislature of East Pakistan in 1954, almost all the 72 seats reserved for the minorities, went to the Hindus.⁶⁶

The persecution of Hindus continued with the establishment of military dictatorship in Pakistan in 1959. The Elective Body Disqualification Order (EBDO) was used to disqualify top minority leaders. Six top minority leaders were disqualified from public life by the Elective Body Disqualification Order (EBDO) in 1959. This gave a shattering blow to the confidence of the minority Hindu community. The Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 was complimented by communal riots engineered by the military regime. The following acts or ordinances of the military government of Pakistan were also responsible for the large-scale exodus of Hindus to India⁶⁷ :

(i) The East Bengal Evacuee Property (Restoration/Possession Act of 1951; (ii) The East Bengal Evacuee (Administration of Immovable Property) Act of 1951; (iii) The East Bengal Prevention of Transfer of Property and Removal of Documents and Records Act of 1952; (iv) The East Pakistan Disturbed Persons (Rehabilitation) Ordinance of 1964 (No minority property could be sold or transferred without government permission.) and (v) The 1965-East Pakistan Enemy Property Administration and Disposal Order of 1966. In 1974, the Awami League government of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman renamed the law as Vested Property Act (VPA).

In the December 1970 general election in Pakistan, Awami League won 167 of 169 seats and over 80 per cent of popular votes in East Pakistan. Numerically Awami League had an absolute majority of seats in the Pakistan National Assembly (167 of the total 313 seats).⁶⁸ The solid outcome of the 1970 elections for Awami League created an alternative power center for an already alienated people.

The differences between the East and West Pakistani politicians snowballed into a major international crisis. On 25 March 1971 Pakistani army on President Yahya Khan's orders initiated a campaign of terror, which lasted till its final surrender to the Indian army on 17 December 1971. This terror campaign by Pak army resulted in 10 million Bangladeshi refugees crossing over to India⁶⁹ and 3 million killed⁷⁰ as per estimate based on reports from most relief agencies and official documents of the Bangladesh government.

Independent Bangladesh emerged as a secular country with a constitutional embargo on religion in politics. The new state of Bangladesh emerged in 1971 under the leadership of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman. The strength of religious elites was almost subdued in this new emergent state. The reason behind this was their (religious elites) controversial support toward the west Pakistani military-bureaucratic elites. Secularism, instead of religious conservatism took position in the mind of common people. The first Constitution passed on 4 November 1972, abolished:⁷¹ (i) all kinds of communalism; (ii) political recognition of religion by the state; (iii) exploitation of religion for political purpose; and (iv) discrimination on religious ground (Article 2 of the Bangladesh Constitution). The preamble of the Constitution emphasized secularism as one of the fundamental principles of state policy.

Following Mujib's assassination in 1975, Bangladesh was set for a period of coups and counter-coups, which took place, eventually resulting in the imposition of martial law by the government headed by General Zia-ur-Rahman in November 1975. He pursued a policy of a linguistic-territorial-Islamic nationalism, which he called as Bangladesh nationalism, in place of linguistic-territorial-secular national as propounded by Mujib.⁷² This military regime, shortly after the coup, changed the constitution from "Bengali nationalism" to "Bangladeshi nationalism". This ultimately brought Islam (conservative) back into the society.

The process of using Islam for leadership legitimation purposes gathered momentum during the military regimes of General Zia-ur-

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Rahman (1975-1981) and General H.M. Ershad (1982-1990). During the regime of General Zia, the Constitution was doctored, the term secularism was scrapped from the four state principles and the words *Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim* (in the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful) were inserted.⁷³ The principle of secularism was replaced by the words, “Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty, Allah shall be the basis of all action.”⁷⁴ General Zia frequently made the recitation of verses from the Quran a regular practice during meetings of his newly formed political organization, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which became the second biggest party in the country after the Awami League. General Zia founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in 1978 to enlarge his political base and held Presidential elections in 1978 to confirm his presidency. This was followed by the holding of the general elections in 1979, which he won comfortably.

General Zia was murdered in Chittagong on 30 May 1981 in a poorly carried coup, and its leader, Major General Mohammad Abdul Manzur, was soon captured and then killed. Zia’s Vice-President, Abdus Sattar, became acting Head of State pending a Presidential election, which he won in November 1981. However, Lt-General Hossain Mohammad Ershad removed him from his post in a bloodless coup in March 1982, unfolding the longest chapter of autocratic rule in the history of Bangladesh.

Between 1982 and 1990, Ershad made systematic efforts to continue the policy of Zia, rehabilitating anti-liberation elements and the parallel Islamisation culminating in the disputable Eighth amendment to the Constitution in 1988 declaring “Islam” as a state religion.⁷⁵ The parliamentary opposition voted against the measure, and a general strike paralyzed Dhaka. In 1988 and thereafter, the BNP and Awami League, in an uneasy alliance, mobilized boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations that crippled the country. Ershad’s government was forced to step down in 1990 by a mass-student led movement, when the military withdrew support and the western donor community became increasingly unhappy with the pervasive corruption of the regime and threatened to reduce its aid levels.⁷⁶

Bangladesh's recent political history has virtually been defined by the tussle for power between the two women- Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. National and local elections in Bangladesh have been marred by politically motivated violence and intimidation prior to, during, and following the polls. The two women whose parties used religion and Islamic fundamentalist parties like the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and became important pawns in pre-election and post-election maneuvering are Hasina's Awami League and Begum Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Discriminatory practices against Hindus and other religious minorities continue to be perpetuated through different means. One such means has been the Vested Property Act, which has existed in Bangladesh since 1960s till now. In 1965, after the Indo-Pakistan War, the then Pakistan Government introduced the Enemy Property (Custody and Registration) Order II of 1965. The Defence of Pakistan Rules identified the minority Hindus as enemies and dispossessed them of their properties. After the war of liberation, the Hindus in Bangladesh thought that the discriminatory Enemy Property Act would be scrapped in matter of time. Surprisingly, however, two new laws were adopted in the Bangladeshi parliament in 1974 namely, "The Enemy Property (Continuance and Emergency Provisions) [Repeal] Act" and "The Vested and Non-Resident Property (Administration) Act".

Under the Enemy Property (Continuance of) Emergency Provisions (Repeal) Act, all enemy properties and firms which were vested with the custodian of enemy property in the then East Pakistan, remained vested in the Government of Bangladesh under the banner of vested property.⁷⁷ The Vested and Non-resident Property (Administration) Act (Act XLVI) of 1974 was enacted to provide the management of certain properties and assets of the persons who are non-residents of Bangladesh or have acquired a foreign nationality. Though the principal aim of the Act XLVI of 1974 was to identify and take over the properties of those residents who left Bangladesh during/ immediately after liberation war and/or took foreign citizenship, in practice this Act XLVI of 1974 was widely used against Hindu

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minorities who had no connection with Pakistan for quite valid and obvious reasons.⁷⁸

In November 1976, General Zia-ur-Rahman abrogated the 'Vested and Non-resident Property (Administration) Act of 1974 and replaced it by Ordinance XCII of 1976. All the Acts prior to Ordinance XCIII of 1976 empowered the Government of Bangladesh only to become the custodian and to preserve enemy property in contemplation of arrangements to be made in the conclusion of peace with India. But the Ordinance XCII of 1976 made the Government owner of vested properties instead of protector of the same.⁷⁹ Thus, the Government encroached the right of ownership, which is a gross violation of the existing laws pertaining to the right to private ownership. These steps were undertaken mainly to strengthen the socio-political base of the vested groups particularly the Muslim community

The intention of the dictatorial regime can be explained in the following words: Firstly, the military dictatorship wanted to do away with the spirit of Bangali nationalism and also they wanted to create a situation of panic and insecurity among the Hindus as they were considered to be the bridge of Bengali nationalism, culture and spirit. Secondly, the military wanted to establish a strong foothold of the ruling Government and the power mechanism over the local level power structure by assisting them to acquire vested properties in exchange for collaboration with the Government. And thirdly, the military dictators wanted to distract the attention of the economically rising sections of the society from the current socio-political developments.

Dispossession of land often occurred in compliance with the authorities either as members of the political parties or as supporters. In 1995, members of the BNP acquired 72 per cent of all vested property; and in 1998, 48 per cent was acquired by the Awami League and 32 per cent by the BNP.⁸⁰ At least two million acres of land has been seized from Hindu landowners under the Vested Property Act.⁸¹ In 1999, about 29 cases of forceful occupation of land and property of the Hindu community have been reported in different newspapers. These include their

homesteads, farmlands and religious places. Influential political forces and their goons have also occupied many of the properties listed as vested property. In 1999 in the Sunamgonj district out of 21,000 acres of vested property land 16,000 acres have been illegally occupied and likewise in the Mymensingh district out of 29,722 acres of vested property land, 28,000 acres of land and 300 houses (vested property) have been occupied by one influential person.⁸² People with political backgrounds were involved in these acts - either as members of political parties or as supporters. It matters little if the party is in power or in opposition.

On 9 April 2001, Parliament passed the Vested Property Return Bill of 2001. This law stipulates that land remaining under government control that was seized under the Vested Property Act of 1965 be returned to its original owners, provided that the original owners or their heirs remain resident citizens.⁸³ Hindus who fled to India and resettled there will not be eligible to have their land returned, and no provisions were included for compensation for or return of properties that the Government has sold. It was also stipulated that the Government must publish a list of vested property holdings by 11 October 2001, and claims must be filed within 90 days of the publication date.⁸⁴ No further claims were to be accepted.

Another form of intimidating the Hindu population has been the issuing of Fatwas against those who have according to the Muslim radicals tried to hurt or undermine the existing social system and religious sentiments. The Muslim radicals first drew international attention in 1993, when a feminist writer Taslima Nasrin was forced to flee the country after receiving death threats from Islamic fundamentalists. Taslima Nasrin's book *Lajja* (Shame) dealing with the hostility towards the Hindu minority in Bangladesh. Her writings and statements provoked death threats from some Islamic groups who claimed that Nasrin had blasphemed the Quran. On 15 September 1998 Taslima Nasrin returned to the country to look after her ailing mother and immediately went into hiding.⁸⁵ Following her return, a fresh warrant was issued on charges of blasphemy and Islamic groups reiterated their demand calling for her arrest and punishment by death.

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The Government provided protection to Nasrin from possible threats. The warrant was never executed, and on 22 November 1998 Nasrin requested and received anticipatory bail from the High Court. In January 1999, Taslima Nasrin left Bangladesh for Sweden after receiving further death threats. The Bangladesh Government also banned her latest novel *Amar Meyebela* (My Childhood Days) published in Kolkata on the grounds that its contents might hurt the existing social system and religious sentiments of the people.⁸⁶ The militants pronounced a death sentence on the writer and offered \$2,000 dollars to anyone who killed her.⁸⁷

While Nasrin's outspoken, feminist writings caused controversy even among moderate Bangladeshi Muslims, the entire state was shocked when, in early 1999, three men attempted to kill Shamsur Rahman, a well-known poet and a symbol of Bangladesh's secular nationhood⁸⁸. In the latter half of January 1999, police in Bangladesh arrested five *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (HUJI) members suspected of plotting the January 18, 1999, assassination attempt on the celebrated poet Shamsur Rahman.⁸⁹ Over the following days, information provided by these activists led to the detention of an interesting mélange of people, including, apart from two more Bangladeshis, an Afghan, a Pakistani and two South Africans. During the ensuing arrests, the police said they seized a list of several intellectuals and writers (including Nasrin), whom local fundamentalist groups had branded "enemies of Islam".⁹⁰

The year 1993 can be termed as the first year of organised protest from the Hindu community in Bangladesh against unabated repression and oppression by the government. During the biggest religious festival of "Durga Puja", the Hindu community demonstrated in anger and protest by hoisting black flags in all religious temples and places of worship. During the festival no deity or idols were set up and no decorations were made. The Bangladesh Puja Uddjapan Parishad (Puja Festival Observance Council) urged the government to accept their charter of demands. They demanded to revoke the Vested Property Act, repeal of the Eighth amendment of the Constitution, and provision to reserve seats for the minorities in the parliament.⁹¹

The Islamic fanatics *Jamaat-e-Islami* an ally of Bangladesh National Party (BNP) attempted to move “Blasphemy” law in the Bangladesh parliament in 1994 to victimise minority communities and secular sections for alleged trading of insults against Prophet Mohammed and Holy Quran. The Blasphemy law was a copy of the law in Pakistan. Apart from the persecution of Hindus the Christian community has come under attack several times in Bangladesh. In 1991-1992 during the Gulf War, supporters of Saddam Hussain, the authoritarian leader of Iraq, and Muslim fanatics in Bangladesh attacked foreigners and Christian community, as if responsible for attacking Iraq during the Gulf War. Several churches in Bangladesh were attacked. In panic and bewildered at the happenings the Christian community petitioned General Ershad and later met Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to express their grievances. However, the racial tension was defused only after Bangladesh troops joined the United Nations for peace-keeping in the Gulf. The Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity Council in their yearly council meeting in 1992 claimed that about 5,00,000 took refuge in India in the last 20 years.⁹²

The Hindu minority has suffered under Governments of both the Awami League and the Bangladesh National Party. The *Ain O Salish Kendra* (ASK), a prominent Bangladeshi NGO, in its report *Power, Safety and the Minorities: A Brief Report* states, “in 1999, about 29 cases of forceful occupation of land and property of the Hindu community have been reported in different newspapers ... In the Sunamgonj district out of 21,000 acres of vested property land 16,000 acres have been illegally occupied; likewise in the Mymensingh district out of 29,722 acres of vested property land, 28,000 acres of land and 300 houses (vested property) have been occupied by one influential person... It matters little if the party is in power or in opposition. In 1995, 72 per cent of all vested property was acquired by members of (the) Bangladesh National Party (BNP); and in 1998, 44 per cent was acquired by the Awami League and 32 per cent by the BNP.”⁹³

Also the Hindu community in Bangladesh has faced persecution in the field of business. In mid-1993, the popularly elected government

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of BNP issued orders, which were interpreted as government policy of persecution of the Hindu community. The Home Ministry asked the commercial banks to control withdrawal of substantial cash money by the Hindu account holders.⁹⁴ The commercial banks were asked to stop disbursement of business loans to Hindu community in the districts adjoining the India-Bangladesh border.⁹⁵

In November 2001, Bangladeshi police arrested journalist and campaigner Shahriar Kabir, for alleged anti-state activities on his return from neighboring India.⁹⁶ Kabir had been filming and writing about alleged attacks on Bangladesh's minority Hindu population around the general elections which brought Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's Islamist-allied government to power. As part of his investigation he visited India to speak to Hindus who fled Bangladesh because of the alleged attacks. He was released on bail in January 2002.⁹⁷ He still faces sedition charges, which carry a life sentence, but a date for his trial has not yet been set. It raises serious questions about the freedom of media and conditions endured by Bangladesh's Hindu minority since the election in October of a new coalition government.

The *Jamaat-e-Islami* has been held responsible by the Bangladeshi Hindus and moderate Muslims for many of the recent attacks against religious minorities, secular intellectuals and journalists in the country. While the *Jamaat-e-Islami* may not be directly behind these attacks, its inclusion in the new government means that the radical groups now enjoy protection from the authorities and can act with impunity.

Since the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won a large majority in the general election on 1 October 2001, its supporters have allegedly been attacking Hindus and other religious minorities because of their perceived support for the rival Awami League party. Police have taken little or no action.⁹⁸ Groups closely linked to the BNP have reportedly driven hundreds of people off their land, and burnt their houses.⁹⁹ According to Bangladeshi news reports, the guard of a Hindu temple at Deobhagh was kidnapped by armed men, who fired shots as they left.¹⁰⁰ Several Hindu doctors from Dhaka Medical College Hospital and Mitford Hospital were also attacked.¹⁰¹

The festival of the Goddess Durga in October is normally the high point of the Bengali Hindu cultural calendar. But in October 2001, for thousands of Hindu families in Bangladesh there was no festival and no rejoicing after the elections. Instead, gangs of Islamic extremists torched their homes, raped women, poisoned ponds and attacked temples. At first, many explained the savagery as a post-electoral revenge spree. Hindus in Muslim-majority Bangladesh typically support the Awami League party, which lost in October's national elections. But the scale and ferocity of the violence – which affected some 4 million people, according to the popular daily newspaper *Janakantho* – has raised the specter of Talibanization in a country usually regarded as a moderate Muslim country.¹⁰² The new Bangladeshi government under Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has deployed police and paramilitary forces, mostly in cities, to suppress the violence. But rural areas have seen the most horrific attacks. Many villages can be reached only by boat or on foot, and information is slow to come out.

Attacks against non-Muslims have continued through April 2002, with the *Ittefaq* reporting on April 12 that BNP cadres went on a rampage against a Hindu family in Coxbazar, looting their belongings and beating up the family members.¹⁰³ In Adhampura village, celebration of a Hindu festival Nam Jagga resulted in acts of arson.¹⁰⁴ Latest occurrences of the continuing violence perpetrated by the Islamic organizations on the religious minorities in Bangladesh have been reported by *Mayer Dak*¹⁰⁵ correspondents based there. On 14 January 2004, journalist Manik Chandra Saha, was killed in a bomb attack by a gang of unidentified miscreants in the Khulna city.¹⁰⁶ A dawn to dusk hartal was observed on 16 January 2004 in protest against the killing of Manik Saha in the city. Manik Saha, 48, a Correspondent of BBC and Khulna Bureau Chief of *Daily New Age*, received multiple bomb injuries on his head and he died on the spot when a gang of miscreants hurled one hand made bomb at him near Mirzapur, some 50 yards off the Khulna Press Club. He was returning from the metropolitan conference of Awami League

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The Bangladesh government in January 2004 banned the sale, publication and distribution of all books and booklets on Islam published by the Ahmadiya Muslim Jamaat.¹⁰⁷ An official announcement said the proscribed publications include Bengali or any other translation (with explanation) of the *Quran Majid*. The ban came in the wake of agitation by some Islamic groups, who also planned demonstrations in the capital tomorrow, for getting the Qadiyanis declared as “non-Muslims”. “The ban was imposed in view of objectionable materials in such publications that hurt or might hurt the sentiments of the majority Muslim population of Bangladesh”, said the announcement of the Bangladesh Home Ministry¹⁰⁸. Around 5,00,000 members of the Ahmadiya community live in Bangladesh, where majority Muslims are ‘Sunni’.

CONCLUSION

The ideals of secularism have always been important, though precarious, in South Asia. Because of its diverse population, the region has long been a theater of conflict between religious communities. Even though the threat of conflict has remained centered around ethnicity or caste, political parties and governments have sometimes appealed to religious considerations to distract attention from other forms of conflict. In all such circumstances it is secularism that has been under threat.

The situation of minorities in Bangladesh is a human rights issue. It is evident that the true spirit and essence of democracy remains an illusion for the minorities in Bangladesh. In the name of majoritarian rule or democracy they have been marginalised politically, economically as well as culturally. The state constitution extends guarantee for the majority, the Bangla Muslims. The Bangladesh Constitution does not reflect the existence of the cultural and ethnic minorities. The political parties and politicians in Bangladesh in order to consolidate their power base have used religion as a tool. It is time that the elected representatives take cognisance of the fact that Bangladesh is not a homogenous state but a multi-national state. This reality ought to be incorporated into the Constitution.

Overall situation of the minorities in Bangladesh will not improve unless fundamental rights laid down in the state constitution as well as by the United Nations Human Rights Declaration are not implemented. Without the political will of the government, it would be difficult to see a society of racial harmony. A culture of tolerance and respect towards each other needs to be practiced. Bangladesh is not a land of the Bangla speaking people alone. The Hindus, Chakmas, the Garos, the Malos, the Santhals and all other communities have contributed and participated in their own ways towards building up this society. Their contribution and sacrifices during the war of liberation and in independent Bangladesh also need to be recorded and acknowledged in the national history of Bangladesh.

The United States has urged Bangladesh to respect religious rights and human rights and practice tolerance. Replying to questions over minority Hindus coming “under attack” in Bangladesh, the US State Department Deputy Spokesman Philip Reeker said that “it’s important for Bangladesh to pursue...aspects of a democracy- tolerance, respect for human rights and respect for religious freedoms so that they can move ahead too and deal with the problems they have – the need for economic development and reform.”¹⁰⁹

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ACCORD INTO DISCORD: CONFLICT AND THE 1997 PEACE ACCORD OF CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

Binalakshmi Nepram

“To the east and south-east of the district of Chittagong stretches a tract of hill and forest, which, though now a British district, was not very long ago an almost unknown territory even to those who were nominally in charge of it. It was for long years entered in the collectorate records of Chittagong as the kapas or cotton mahal of that district, a land of impervious jungle and malarious climate, into which no Bengalee might venture and live...it is a country rough and primeval.”

- Alexander Makenzie, 1873

THE LAND

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is one of South Asia's beautiful places having dense vegetation. The topography of the place is interspersed with hills, ravines, and cliffs, originally covered by dense bamboo trees, and creeper jungles. The hills run from south in a northwesterly direction in the region. The relief ranges from 1,000 to 2,000 feet above the sea level in the north to 1,500-2,900 feet in the south. Bangladesh's highest peak, Kyokra-dong (4,034 feet), is located in this region. The CHT consists of six beautiful main valleys that are formed by the Chengi, Kassalong, Maini, Matamuhri, Rankhyong, and Sangu rivers and their myriad tributaries. The place is like a bowl, a beautiful emerald base that is surrounded by the blue hills.

In the north of CHT, there is the formation of three major valleys of the rivers that are flowing southwards namely the Chengi, Kassalong, and Maini rivers. These three valleys constitute the largest area of contiguous fertile land in the region. Due to poor soil condition in most parts, only 3.2 % of land in the region is suitable for all-purpose agriculture, about 15% is suitable for fruit gardening and forestry and 77% of the land is suited for forests.

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In the early 1990s Gait and Allen wrote in the *Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India*, “The general aspect of the district is a tangled mass of hill, ravine, and cliff, covered by dense tree, bush, and creeper jungle.¹ The mountains are steep, and can only be ascended slowly and painfully along the narrow zigzag paths through the jungle”. With an area of 13,295 sq. kms, the area is strategically situated in the south eastern part of Bangladesh and shares two international boundaries as borders – North East Indian states of Tripura and Mizoram on its north and east respectively and the Arakan and Chin states of Myanmar on its south and east respectively. Geographically, CHT is a part of Hill Tripura and Arakan Yoma branching off from the Himalayan range and continuing to the south through Assam and Hill Tripura of India to Arakan of Myanmar. The region comprises of three districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Banderban. The districts constitute the seven main valleys formed by the Feni, Karnafuli, Chengi, Myani, Kassalong, Sangu and the Matahmuhri rivers.

Geographically, the CHT can be divided into two broad ecological zones : hill valley and agricultural plains. The CHT is an extension of the Hindukush-Himalayan belt, and is strikingly different from the flat delta plains areas of mainland Bangladesh.² The CHT covers about nine per cent of the total area of Bangladesh and has half the forest lands. Temperature in CHT ranges from 10.2 degrees to 35.1 degrees Celsius throughout the year. Rainfall ranges from 85 to 120 inches a year. The southern part, however, receives more rainfall than the north. 80 % of the rainfall takes place in May-September and is usually very heavy.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS OF CHT

As noted earlier, CHT is surrounded on its northern part by Tripura State of India, on its west by Chittagong District of Bangladesh and on the east and south by Mizoram State of India and Arakan of Myanmar. Multiple administrative system is a characteristic of this region. First, the region is divided into three districts, which is headed by a Deputy Commissioner.

Chittagong Hill Tracts : Administrative Divisions

District	Thana	Union	Mouza	Village
Bandarban	8	31	95	1,343
Khagrachari	9	37	120	1,471
Rangamati	11	50	162	1,284
Total	28	118	37	4,098

The other administration system is indigenous to the region, which has its roots in the British administration system. According to this system, the CHT region is also divided into three circles that roughly matches the boundaries of the administrative districts – namely, the Chakma Circle, the Bohmong Circle, and the Mong Circle. The head of each circle is called the Chief. After the signing of the CHT Peace Accord, Regional Council was established in December 1997. This Council is now the ultimate authority within the region.

Even at the village level there are multiple dimensions. During the British times, for the convenience of administration, each circle was divided into a number of *mouzas*. Each *mouza* was placed under a headman and each village within the *mouza* was placed under a *karbari*. The headman collects tax from the household heads in the villages for the circle chief. The headman is entitled to a percentage of this yearly tribute. The headman is also entitled to 25 acres of free non-taxable land. Villages in CHT are also served by the Union Council called *Porishod*. The Council has an elected Chairman representing the union and members. The responsibilities of the Council include a routine liaising with the government and to receive resources from it for the development of the village.

THE PEOPLE OF CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

The people of CHT call themselves as “Jumma People”. Mackenzie wrote in 1884: “The Chittagong Hill Tracts is the abode of nomad cultivators, who have a hard struggle to maintain life against the savagery of nature and their more barbarous neighbours.”³

The *Jumma* people are composed of 13 main nationalities. According to the 1991, Census the population in CHT was about 974,465. That was an eight-fold increase from 125,000 in the year 1901.⁴ Chakmas form the

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largest of these and they live mostly in the central and northern parts of the region, including the capital, Rangamati. The Marmas are the second highest ethnic group in the region and they inhabit parts of south and north-eastern parts of the Hill Tracts. The Chakmas and the Marmas both practice Hinduism. The third largest ethnic group is Tripuras. They follow Hinduism and mostly inhabit the North. The above three ethnic groups make up about 87 per cent of the hill peoples and they live mostly in the valley areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The other ten nationalities numbering about 40,000 reside mostly in the south and they occupy mostly the hill ridges. They include the Bawn, Bonjugi, Chak, Khumi, Khyang, Lushei, Mro, Murung, Ryang, Pangkhua/Pankho, and Tanchangya.

According to the 1991 Census, the Chittagong Hill Tracts has 51 per cent Jumma people and 49 per cent Bengali people. 70,000 Jumma refugees who were in Tripura State of India were not included in this census. There has been a sharp increase in the number of Bangladeshis since 1971 due to the Government sponsored migration policy.

Ethnic Groups in Chittagong Hill Tracts, 1991

Ethnic Group	Bandarban	Khagrachari	Rangamati	Total Number	%age
Bawn	1,681	-	549	6,978	.72
Chak	4,163	-	319	2,000	.21
Chakma	1,150	77,869	157,385	239,417	24.56
Khumi	1,425	-	91	1,241	.13
Khyang	226	-	525	1,950	.20
Lushei	59,288	-	436	662	.07
Marma	21,963	42,178	40,868	142,334	14.61
Mro	99	40	164	22,167	2.27
Pangkhua/ Pankho	5,493	-	3,128	3,227	.33
Tanchangya	8,187	-	13,718	19,211	1.97
Tripura	-	47,077	5,991	61,255	6.28
Bengali	6,429	175,069	178,098	473,301	48.57
Others	229	355	244	758	.08
Total	230,569	342,488	401,388	974,501	100.00

Source : *Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics*, 1992.

Various Tribes in Chittagong Hill Tracts and their Select Features and Origins

Ethnic Group	Alternative Name	Branch/ Sub-branch of Mongoloid	Linguistic Family/ Group	Place of Origin
Bawn	Boam, Bon, Bonjugi, Bangogi, Banjogi	Kuki	Kuki-Chin	Mizoram, India
Chak	Asak	Meyu-Shag	Tibeto-Burman	Unan Province, Upper Myanmar
Chakma	Chakma, Sak, Thak, Takam	Arakanee	Indo-Aryan	–
Khumi	Khyme	Sino-Tibetan	Kuki-Chin	Chin Hill State Arakan, Myanmar
Khyang	Kheyang, Khayeng, Sho, Khuan	Chin-Arakanee	Tibeto-Burman	Chin Hill State Arakan, Myanmar
Lushai	Lushei, Shandu, Lushaik,	Kuki	Kuki-Chin	Mizoram, India
Marma	Magh, Mogh	Mon-Taloing	Tibeto-Burman	Hainthawadee, Myanmar
Mrung	Mro, Moro, Mru	Sino-Tibetan	Tibeto-Burman	Arakan, Myanmar Mizoram, India
Pangkhua	Pankhu, Pankko, Panko, Pakhin, Panhko	Kuki	Kuki-Chin	
Rakhain	Magh, Arakan, Rohang	Arakanee	Tibeto-Burman	Arakan, Myanmar
Tanchangya	Tanchonga, Doinak	Arakanee	Indo-Aryan	Arakan, Myanmar
Tripura	Tripra, Tip(p)era, Mrung, Boro	Tripura	Bodo	Tripura, India

Source : Mohammad Rafi & R.Chowdhury (Ed.), *Counting the Hills: Assessing Development in Chittagong Hill Tracts*, 2001

THE CONFLICT IN CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

In the year 1964, the then East Pakistan government abolished the special status of the CHT, thus opening up the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to outsiders. Bengali Muslim families started settling there in numbers large enough to alarm the Jummas, who felt that it was official government policy to outnumber them in their own land. Grounds for this fear could be seen in the industries like Kaptai hydroelectric power station, Chandraghona paper mill whose founding in the CHT coincided with the influx of Bengali Muslims who were given preferential employment.

And then eight years after the independence of Bangladesh, President Ziaur Rahman presided at a secret meeting in mid-1979 during which it was decided to settle 30,000 Bangladeshi families during the following year. As a result of the meeting, implementation committees, made up of government officers and leading Bangladeshi settlers, were formed at district and sub divisional levels. The district commissioner headed the district committee and sub-divisional officers led the sub-divisional committees. The committees appointed agents from among the Bangladeshi settlers and assigned them to contact landless Bangladeshis willing to settle in the CHT. These were not hard to find and from February 1980 truckloads of poor Bangladeshi families poured into the CHT attracted by the government scheme to provide five acres of land, Taka 3,600 to each new settler family. According to the USAID, in July 1980 the government decided to resettle 100,000 Bangladeshis from the plains in the CHT in the first phase of this scheme.

Though the Bangladesh Government initially denied its settlement program, in May 1980 the government confirmed its policy towards the Chittagong Hill Tracts and started actively to encourage settlers to move there. A secret memorandum from the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division to government officials in other districts stated that it was “the desire of the government that the concerned deputy commissioners will give top priority to this work and make the program a success”. During 1980 some 25,000 Bangladeshi families were settled in the CHT.

At the same time thousands of Jumma families, dispossessed by the Kaptai dam project in the early 1960s, were still attempting to get some kind of monetary or land compensation.

DISPOSSESSION OF JUMMA LAND

The Bangladeshi settlers, with the connivance of the Bangladeshi administration, have been able to take over land and even the whole villages. There has been severe population pressure on land in Bangladesh generally and Jumma land had been regarded as readily available. One excuse often given for allowing or encouraging this immigration is the relatively low population density in the CHT. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had noted that “the Chittagong Hill Tracts are relatively less crowded than the plains of Bangladesh. Because of this difference in population densities, there has for some time been a migration from the crowded plains to the hills.”⁵ In 1967, a study commissioned by Dhaka, however, concluded that “as far as its developed resources are concerned, the hill tracts is as constrained as the most thickly populated district... The emptiness of the hill tracts, therefore, is a myth”. Only 5 per cent of land outside forest reserves is suitable for intensive field cropping. In spite of the shortage of farming land in the tracts, the government has succeeded in attracting many thousands of landless Bangladeshis. To be landless in Bangladesh is to be absolutely poor and dependent. Jobs are seasonal, insecure, and salary is enough for subsistence only. An agricultural labourer receives about five Takas a day when he is working and is usually unemployed for about six months of the year. For the overwhelming majority of Bangladesh’s rural population there is little hope to escape from constant poverty. The settlement plans offer an opportunity which no landless or poor Bangladeshi family can ignore. The land, however, being unarable, and the money and food grants depleted by corrupt officials, can mean survival for six months or more for poor Bangladeshi peasants. The Bangladeshi peasants who move to the Chittagong Hill Tracts come principally from the plains districts of Chittagong, Noakhali, Sylhet and Comilla, and have no experience of hill slope cultivation. When they

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find they cannot make a living from the land they have been given, they encroach on Jumma owned land. There were various ways in which the Jumma people have been, and still are being dispossessed of their lands. In many cases, Bangladeshi settlers move into an area and gradually encroach on the lands of their Jumma neighbours. A Chakma refugee from Panchari describes the initial process as follows:

“In 1980-81 the Bengalis moved in. The government gave them rations of rice etc. and sponsored them. The settlers moved into the hills, then they moved the Jummas by force with the help of the Bangladesh Army. The Deputy Commissioner would come over and say that this place was suitable for settlers so Jumma people must move and would receive money in compensation. But in reality they did not get money or resettlement. In 1980 the Jumma people had to move by order of the government”.

Attacks on Jumma peoples’ villages are the most common way to evict the inhabitants from their lands. A Tripura refugee in India from Bakmara Taindong Para near Matiranga described what happened to his village in 1981 when the settlers moved into his village:

“Muslims from different parts of Bangladesh were brought in by Bangladeshi authorities. Before that our village was populated only by Chakma, Tripura and Marma. With the assistance of the government these settlers were rehabilitated in our village and they continued to give us troubles..they finger at the Jummas and the army beats them and rob. They took all the food grain. Whenever we seek any justice from the army, we don’t get it. All villagers lived under great tension due to various incidents all around. Three days after an incident when six persons had been killed, just before getting dark, many settlers came to our village, shouting ‘Allah Akbar’ (Allah is Great). When they arrived, we escaped so the settlers got the opportunity to set fire”.

A Chakma refugee in Tripura told what happened to his village in 1986:

“I lost my land. Settlers came and captured my land. They burnt our houses first. They came with soldiers. This took place on 1st May 1986 at

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Kalanal, Panchari. My house was in a village with a temple. The whole village of 60 houses was burnt. After seeing this we ran through the jungles and eventually reached India, coming to Karbook camp.”

The Bangladeshi government has been arguing that settlement in the CHT is necessary because much of the land there is uncultivated and, therefore, in their view wasted. Furthermore Dhaka maintains that “it would be against the constitution to prevent any Bangladeshi from settling or buying land in any part of the country”. This argument takes little account of the economic or political realities of the CHT, where little land is suitable for farming and where the traditional owners are coerced into giving up their property. As an example, India could have used the same argument in the Muslim majority state of Kashmir, where most of the land as in CHT is empty. By settling people from overcrowded part of the country Kashmir, India could have altered the demographic profile of Kashmir from a Muslim majority to Hindu majority state. But Indian constitution forbids settlement in areas like Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram etc, in order to preserve their distinct cultural, religious and ethnic character.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE CHT

Numerous instances of killings, destruction of villages, plunders, rapes, and tortures took place. Since 1971, the Bangladesh military and settlers had perpetrated 13 major massacres in which 6,009 indigenous people were killed. From December 1971 to December 1997 about 10,000 houses were burnt down. 1,000 women were raped and 72,090 people had to seek assylum as refugees in India. There were 250,090 internally displaced people and approximately 24,000 Jumma people lost their lives due to extra-judicial executions, massacres, tortures, illnesses, starvations etc. CHT Commission reported that there were over 230 army camps, more than 100 BDR camps and over 80 police camps in the CHT. In the north there are over 200 army camps, more than 90 BDR camps and over 40 police camps; in the South (Bandarban District) there are more than 30 army camps, over 40 police camps and nine BDR camps.

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Army	24 th Infantry Division	80,000
BDR	6 Battalions	25,000
Ansars	4 Battalions	8,000
Navy	1 Battalion	1,500
Total		114,000

Source : CHT Commission, *This Life is not Ours*

Earlier Reports on the CHT gave an impression that the number of the armed personnel provided by the Bangladesh military was very low, particularly as compared to the estimates provided by the informants from among the Jumma people, not taking into account VDPs and Police. Earlier reports on the CHT have estimated the military strength from 30,000 in 1981 to 1,20,000 in 1984 (including para-military and police forces). Military handbooks such as the Military Balance (1989/90), Military Technology (1989) and Military Powers (1990) estimate that the number of army personnel in Bangladesh vary between 80,000 and 90,000 (excluding navy and air force) plus 55,000 to 80,000 para-military forces (including armed police). According to the CHT Commission, the ratio of military personnel and the number of Jumma civilians in the CHT is 1:6. This according to CHT Commission makes “CHT the most militarised region on Earth. The number of troops in the CHT have not diminished even after the CHT Treaty was signed in December 1997.”

Rape is used systematically as a weapon against Jumma women in the CHT. Rape is a recurring characteristics of attacks by the Bangladesh military and by the Bangladeshi settlers on Jumma villages. Many women were gang raped by the soldiers of the Bangladesh Army, often in front of their children. Women live in continuous fear of rape. Women who have been raped may be rejected by their husbands or their families, or may not be able to get married. If they become pregnant they have to conceal this fact and must try to have an abortion. If a child is born it is impossible for the woman to stay in her community as the situation is not accepted and she is ostracized. For these reasons women who have been raped, hesitate to talk about it at all because they are scared or worried about the social stigma. This makes it difficult to collect information on such sensitive issue. The trauma of

rape remains with these women form years, and many of them are still suffering from its repercussions years later.

RELIGIOUS PROSECUTION IN THE CHT

Religious persecution against the Jumma people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has been a marked feature of the CHT conflict, committed by the Bangladesh military and the Bangladeshi settlers. Forced assimilation of the Jumma people into the Islamic culture of Bangladesh has remained the policy of the Government and the military since 1975.

Religious persecution in the CHT occurs in different forms- forcible conversion of the Jumma people to Islam, destruction and desecration of the places of worship, prevention of worship, forcible marriage, naming the towns and villages of the CHT in Arabic, etc. An exiled Chakma Buddhist monk in the refugee camp of India stated: "Recently a Kathina Chibar Dana festival was arranged near Rangamati. People in the CHT feel that if they attend the festival it will be beneficial. This is a Buddhist ceremony, when people would prepare cotton, spin, weave, dye and give it to the temple. It is one of the most important festivals in the Buddhist calendar. People from Kaptai went to the ceremony. Twenty six people met some soldiers. The 10 men were separated from 16 women. The men were beaten up and forced to dance naked around the Buddhist temple and the women were gang raped in the forest. This happened on October 19, 1990". These violations are not isolated incidents in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The Jumma peoples of the CHT are Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Animists. These religious groups reflect ethnic differences. The Chakma, Tangchanya and Marma are mainly Buddhists, the Tripuras Hindus and some smaller groups such as the Bawm and Pankhua are Christians. Mru and Khumi practise what is known as Animism. Religious tolerance has been a long tradition of the Jumma people. One way of understanding this tolerance is to see it in terms of an underlying element common throughout the CHT which consists of different manifestations of an underlying stratum of animistic traits which co-exists with Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity.

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Bangladesh has Islam as the state religion. The state education is oriented to 'mainstream' nationalism and in some cases has a strong Islamic influence. Bengali predominates over other languages and, apart from the few cases where the Jumma people have developed their own schools, the educational system in the CHT is designed to draw the Jumma people into the Islamic culture of Bangladesh. The main Islamic missionary organization is *Al Rabita*, funded by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. This non-governmental organization has been working since 1980 to convert the Jumma people. It has a main office in Dhaka and offices in Rangamati, Langadu where it also has a hospital, Barkal, Alikadam of the CHT.

Throughout the CHT, the construction of mosques continues to take place. Loudly amplified calls to prayer frequently punctuate the lives of the Jumma people. The Bangladeshi authorities argue that their religious tolerance can be seen in Buddhist, Hindu and Christian Welfare Trust. However, this Trust was established in 1986, before the constitution was changed in 1988 making Islam the state religion of Bangladesh. During that year the government gave 10 million Taka (Bangladeshi currency) for a fund to distribute 1.5 million Taka annually for religious projects. The Chairman of the Trust is a Muslim and other six members of the board are appointed by the government. Among other things, the Trust provides money to repair temples. One Chakma fellow said that when he went to the Central Audit Bureau to seek support from the Welfare Fund, he was told: "Why don't you become a Muslim and we'll all be brothers".

EMERGENCE OF ARMED RESISTANCE IN THE CHT

The *Jana Samhati Samiti* (JSS) or the United People's Party, the political platform of the Jumma people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, was formed on February 15, 1972 under the leadership of Manabendra Narayan Lasma. The JSS was formed to enable the stopping of increasing influx of Bengalis from the Bangladeshi plains. The aim and objective of the *Jana Samhati Samiti* was: "*The Achievement of the right of self-determination of various small nationalities, such as the Chakma, Marma (Mogh), Tripura, Bom, Murung, Pankho,*

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Khumi, Chak, Khiang and Lushai". The JSS was formed

...in order to be free from Islamic fanaticism, expansionism, exploitation, oppression, deprivation and perpetual rule of Bangladesh and to safeguard the national entity and homeland for various multilingual nationalities – (a) To ensure the separate entity status of CHTs with a constitutional guarantee, (b) To establish regional autonomy with a Legislative Assembly... Chittagong Hill Tracts is the homeland of various multi-lingual small nationalities. Therefore – (a) To do away with differences, oppression, exploitation and deprivation among the various multilingual small nationalities; (b) To develop culture and language of the various small nationalities.⁶

The armed wing of the JSS, the *Shanti Bahini* (SB) was formed at March 7, 1972 . The party started its armed struggle in 1976. The SB began its activities by establishing its headquarters at Dighinala in the CHT. Training was provided by the East Pakistan Rifles and military personnel with weapons left behind by the Pakistan Army in the jungles of CHT. According to members of the *Shanti Bahini*, the creation of a military wing was necessitated by two factors, the military activities of the *Mukti Bahini* in the CHT and the failure of the state to take any action against these, together with the outright rejection of the hill people's demands by Sheikh Mujib. This made them apprehensive of their physical security within the new state. It led Shantu Larma, the Chief of PCJSS (the *Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti*) to believe that in the new state they have to protect their own rights, if necessary by force.⁷

According to Amena Mohsin, the *Shanti Bahini* is just a part of the armed branch of PCJSS. While the *Shanti Bahini* is the centrally controlled guerrilla army, its auxiliary that is the militia maintains law and order and provides security to the villages that are under the party's control. The regular guerrillas of the *Shanti Bahini* are organised into six territorial sectors, three command posts providing operational command and control on a zonal basis, and a sector reserve force under the direct operational command of the Shanti Bahini Commander-in-Chief.⁸ At the peak of its operation the *Shanti Bahini* numbered about

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15,000 fighters, though Dhaka put the figure down between 5,000 and 7,000 with 1,200 weapons. There was also a reserve force of about 50,000 trained youth. Most of these youth belong to the Chakma community, majority of them being from the refugee camps of Tripura and Mizoram. For weapons supply, the *Shanti Bahini* relied heavily on arms captured from the Bangladesh Army. Most of the members of the *Shanti Bahini* come from Chakma, Tripura and Marma communities. The group has extensive organisational networks in Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban districts. Its activities include, besides ambushing army patrols, attacking Bangladeshi settlements in the Hill Tracts.

As far as fund-raising is concerned, the PJSSS raises its revenue from local villages in the CHT and also imposes tolls and taxes on the Bengali traders and contractors based in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. According to Amena Mohsin, “The rate of tolls and taxes is determined by the rate of profit accrued from trade or work. For example, the following amount of tax was imposed on the items mentioned below on an annual basis: Large boats - Taka 4,500, medium boats - Taka 3,000, small boats - Taka 2,000; on building constructions - 7% of the total budget; fishermen - Taka 500- Taka 3,000, depending on the nature of fishing equipments”.

About the end of the dictatorial rule of General Hussain Mohammad Ershad in 1990, Hill Students Council (PCP), Hill People’s Council (PGP) and Hill Women’s Federation (HWF) were formed. These organizations played an important role in the movement for autonomy of the Jumma people. They organized rallies and demonstrations throughout the Chittagong Hill Tracts and put tremendous pressure upon the government.

THE 1997 CHITTAGONG HILL TRACT PEACE ACCORD

The Chittagong Hill Tract Accord is one of most important ethnic peace accords in the South Asia. The Accord led to cessation of a protracted twenty year old hostilities between the tribal guerrilla group, the *Shanti Bahinis* and the Bangladeshi government. In one of the most ornate ceremonies at the Khagrachari Stadium in Khagrachari District

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of Chittagong Hill Tracts, weapons were laid down in front of the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by Shantu Larma and his soldiers signaling the end of the two decade guerrilla warfare fought in CHT from bastions both within and outside Bangladesh. The Chittagong Hill Tract Accord signed on 2 December 1997 by Abdul Hasnat Abdulla, Chief Whip of the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and the head of the government appointed Committee on the Chittagong Hill Tracts and J.B.Larma, the President of the *Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati* became an example of conflict resolution in the world. Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina was awarded UNESCO's Felix Houphouet-Boigny Peace Prize in recognition of her contribution to peace-making in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, a year after the Accord was signed in 1998.

It has been nearly six years that the peace accord was signed. And yet so much is left to be done to implement it steadily and fully. The land disputes are yet to be settled, rehabilitation of the *Shanti Bahini* cadres who had surrendered and also of the tribal refugee returnees from India await completion and the interim Regional Council has to work for greater harmony between the tribals and Bengali settlers. And above all, the highly fragmented and fissured Bangladeshi politics remains till date the main hindrance towards the implementation of the Peace Accord, that the whole world had hailed.

Through the peaks and troughs of the negotiations for peace in the CHT, BNP and other political parties had been associated with the process, a fact of history that cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, it is on record that the BNP MPs did not take part in the meetings of the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts (NCCHT) when substantive negotiations were in progress with the PCJSS. Much of the peace accord was advanced by the BNP when they were in power; but it is a pity that the two BNP members on the NCCHT absented without giving their inputs to the negotiations to 'perfect the treaty' and take credit for it. Shantu Larma had once warned : "*Implement accord or I won't hesitate to shed blood*". In its 2000 Report, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission stated that : "There are a number

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of questions and issues which the accord leaves unresolved and which, if not addressed, could lead to a breakdown of peace.”⁹

About six years later, the Accord has not brought peace in the region. Rather, the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts are divided into two bitter rival groups, namely, the JSS and the UPDF (United People’s Democratic Front). Peace agreements, though successful in some cases, sometimes do contain the seeds of their own destruction. Kalevi Holsti argued in his monumental study, *Peace and War : Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648 – 1989*, the success of peace settlements to a large extent depends upon their ability to “anticipate and devise means to cope with the issues of the future.” Failure to do so may “set the stage for future eras of conflict and war”. Treaties and Accords are not only understandings of a particular discursive shape. They may be interpretative documents of the current reality of conflicts. Their rules of operation make them act on the succeeding pattern of conflicts.¹⁰ The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord is one such accord. The 68 point peace accord, which is the culmination of intense negotiations between the government and the PCJSS, is aimed at peacefully resolving the 23 year long insurgency and unrest in the south-eastern hill districts of the country. The treaty is aimed inter alia at expediting the overall socio-economic development process of Bangladesh, preserving the rights of all citizens as enunciated under the fundamental rights under the Constitution, consolidating peace, harmony, stability, rule of law and good government in the country and forging greater understanding and cooperation among the peoples. The treaty is also expected to make very positive and long-lasting contributions to enhancing of image of the country to the international community and at the United Nations particularly from the human rights perspective.

POST-1997 ACCORD DEVELOPMENTS IN CHT

The CHT Accord and the Land Issues

According to Raja Devashish Roy, the Accord contains various provisions aimed at the protection of the land rights of the indigenous peoples and measures to redress the large scale instances of land

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dispossession suffered by the indigenous people. However, years after the accord, it is still a matter of debate as to what extent the Accord has actually reversed the aforesaid process of colonization and marginalization.¹¹

Land related provisions of the Accord are yet to be acted upon. These include;

- (i) the transfer of land administration authority to the hill district councils (HDCs), including executive authority over lower level land administration officials (including headmen, chairmen, AC (land), etc.,
- (ii) the rehabilitation of a section of the erstwhile international indigenous refugees and all of the internally displaced indigenous people,
- (iii) the cancellation of land leases granted to non-residents,
- (iv) the settlement of land disputes by a Commission on Land,
- (v) land grants to landless indigenous people.

Clause 4, Part D of the CHT Accord of 1997 stated :

“A commission (land commission) headed by a retired justice shall be formed for settling land disputes. This commission, in addition to settle disputes of lands of the rehabilitated tribal refugees, shall have fullest power for cancellation of ownership of those lands and hills which have been so far illegally settled and occupied. No appeal can be made against the judgement of this commission and decision of this commission shall be final. This (arrangement) shall be applicable in case of fringe land also.”

Clause 5, Part D of the CHT Accord stated:

“This commission shall be set up with the following members:

- a. Retired justice
- b. Circle Chief (concerned)
- c. Chairman of the Regional Council/representative
- d. Divisional Commissioner/Additional Commissioner
- e. Hill District Council Chairman (concerned).”

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Clause 6 Part D stated:

- “a. The term of the commission shall be three years. But the term of it can be extended in consultation with the Regional Council.
- b. Commission shall settle disputes according to the existing rules, customs and usages of Chittagong Hill Tracts.”

Thus in 1999, in accordance with the CHT Accord of 1997, a “Commission on Land” was established. The Commission has the power to provide remedies in cases of land-related disputes, including the authority to declare that those cases which involved illegal settlements and dispossessions are void under the law. According to Roy, the Commission will not act in the nature of an enquiry commission but as a tribunal. The CHT Accord and the subsequent CHT Land Commission Act of 2001 (Act 53 of 2001) guarantees that the decisions of the commission will be final.

Almost six years after the Accord, the commission is yet to start functioning. A major stumbling block has been the refusal of the CHTRC to accept some provisions of the Land Commission Act, including the provision which provides over-ruling authority to the chairperson in cases where there is no unanimity in decision-making.¹² This according to Roy “...is an unprecedented departure from the way in which courts and tribunals of law consisting of more than one judge operate and decide cases before them.”¹³ And besides, there are still tens of thousands of land related cases to be heard which may require several years to adjudicate. Also, severe difficulties will have to be overcome when conflicting claims based on registered title and those based upon customary rights are brought before the Commission.

Women of CHT and the Peace Accord

The laws of CHT – both customary and other laws do not address gender issues. Women in CHT have a powerful role in the struggle for the rights of the Jumma people. However, inheritance laws here in CHT do not provide any provisions for them. The CHT Accord is silent on this issue.

Emergence of CHT People's Movement for Land Rights

People in CHT have organized themselves in order to defend their rights through democratic methods like strikes, writings on the walls, mass memoranda, non-cooperation, rallies etc

The **Committee for the Protection of Forest and Land Rights in the CHT** is a result of such a movement. The Committee has been trying to raise public awareness about the threat to the rights of indigenous people through the government's process of creating new reserved forests on lands that are owned and occupied by indigenous people. There has also been other mobilization and advocacy work by formal and non-formal organizations of fisher people, wood cutters, landless people and women, among many others. Another instance is that of village communities that manage their village common forests (VCFs) or "*mauza* reserves" (also known as "service" forests) and protect them from other non-indigenous peoples.

Other Failures in Land Issue in the CHT Accord

Some land related problems, have been directly addressed by the CHT Accord while some have not been addressed at all. The Accord stated that any lease of land that has not been utilized for more than ten years will be cancelled. Though the newly created Ministry of CHT Affairs has instructed the collectorate officials – the Deputy Commissioners – to cancel these leases, but nothing substantial has been accomplished so far. Land comes under the Ministry of Land and not the Ministry of CHT Affairs, the orders have to come from the former and not the later.

The dispossession of the land through the population transfer programme has not been directly addressed in the Accord. Members of the indigenous people's party, the JSS had claimed that the Government of Bangladesh had verbally agreed to resettle the Bengali settlers outside the CHT, a claim that the Awami League denies. The present BNP government is even more unlikely to agree to having the settlers rehabilitated outside the CHT since the Bengali settlers themselves voted overwhelmingly for the BNP, and it was the previous BNP government that officially sponsored the transmigration

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programme. At the moment, the land issue seems to be completely shelved. As the Chakma Chief laments:¹⁴

In the aftermath of the Peace Accord of 1997, a number of major developments on forest and land issues seem more than likely. The rulings of the land commission may be unable to adequately resolve the multi-dimensional problem of land possession (and dispossession) from a humanitarian perspective. The acceleration of the land privatisation process in the CHT, which may exclude the relatively disadvantaged section of the CHT residents, is certain to continue at an even faster pace. The rate of deforestation in areas is likely to continue as before. These developments would surely hamper the post-Accord process of rehabilitation and development, and deepen the ecological crisis that has been accelerated by the Kaptai Dam, endemic deforestation, and the unsuitable plantation and cultivation patterns of recent years. More importantly, they may fuel further political unrest and worse.

The Case of Displaced People and the CHT Peace Accord

The hydroelectric dam at Kaptai Village in the Rangamati district was completed in 1960 creating an artificial lake of 550 square miles. The lake inundated most of the Karnaphuli valley and large parts of Chengi, Kassalong and Maini valleys containing paddy fields and vegetable gardens. The project led to the displacement of approximately 100,000 people from their ancestral lands out of which about 40,000 crossed over to India as refugees in the year 1964. The dam submerged approximately 54,000 acres or 40 % of the plough lands of the CHT. A lot of the Jumma refugees spilled into the north east Indian states of Mizoram and Tripura.

PEACE IS STILL ILLUSIVE IN CHT

The irony of the 1997 Peace Accord was that as the surrender ceremony was going on at the Khagrachari Stadium on 10 February 1998, several Jumma activists mostly from the Hill People's Council, Hill Students Council, and Hill Women's Federation openly showed their disappointment and waved black flags and shouted slogans

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condemning the Accord. And on 26 December 1998, these opposing groups formed the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) in Dhaka.

The argument of the UPDF is that though the JSS declared a unilateral cease-fire on 10 August 1992 to show its willingness for dialogue after which the negotiations started, culminating in an accord in December 1997, none of the Jumma overground organizations, intellectuals or community leaders were consulted or taken into confidence by the JSS before the signing of the Accord. Given the pace of the negotiation and uninterrupted five year long cease-fire - unheard of in the history of peace negotiations - the Jummas did not expect miracles from the Accord.

UPDF believes that the success of any Accord does not lie in the piece of paper signed by the parties concerned. Yet, any inadequacies can be addressed through the in-built mechanisms for implementation of the Accord. According to the UPDF, the Accord failed abysmally on that score. The mechanisms for implementation of the Accord were built in only for the JSS and not for the Government of Bangladesh that has the primary responsibility to implement the Accord. In a nutshell, the JSS even failed to incorporate mechanisms for implementation of the Accord. The UPDF said : "From the declaration of a unilateral cease-fire on 10 August 1992 to the signing of the Peace Accord on 2 December 1997, it was desperation, not serious thinking, that dictated the actions of the JSS. UPDF had little reason to be cheerful about the Accord".

According to Sona Ram Chakma, UPDF Representative in Tokyo, "The post-accord situation demonstrates the fact that the so-called peace treaty has met with abject failure and peace is still illusive in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The accord has failed because it failed miserably to address the main demands of the Jumma people namely, autonomy for the CHT, constitutional recognition to its people, restoration of land rights, withdrawal of the military and the settlers from the CHT. Unless these fundamental demands of the Jumma people

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are met, no agreement, whoever signs it, will bring about peace and stability in the region. The sooner the Bangladesh government acknowledges this reality, the better.”

The much vaunted peace treaty was signed with a view to ending decades-old armed hostility and bringing peace and stability in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The salient features of the accord are (1) surrender of all JSS and armed Shanti Bahini members while the government would dismantle the temporary and base camps of the army (2) the government were to constitute a land commission to settle all land disputes arising between the settlers and the Jumma people, (3) formation of a Regional Council as an apex body of the three District Councils, (4) the government were to withdraw all cases filed against the JSS and Shanti Bahini members, but no mention was made of the false and conspiratorial cases framed against the members of the three organizations.

Sona Ram Chakma further stated : “Thanks to incessant propaganda launched by the government through its electronic and print media, euphoria about the accord was created. Hopes for much cherished peace ran high among the people, as both the parties to the accord assured time and again that it would resolve the outstanding problems of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.”

Now it has been over six years since the treaty was signed. A pertinent question that one may ask today is, has the promised peace dawned in the Chittagong Hill Tracts? Did the Jumma people get their lands back? Has the army been withdrawn or have the settlers been brought back from the Chittagong Hill Tracts? The answer to these questions is a BIG NO. Even the JSS supremo Santu Larma, acknowledged that peace is still a far cry. According to him, “I am made the Chairperson of the CHT Regional Council but have hardly any powers to affect any positive changes.” He is also completely disillusioned with the accord, giving rise to a sense of despair and disappointment.

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DEMOGRAPHIC INVASION FROM BANGLADESH

Bibhuti Bhusan Nandy

Migration occurs when conditions of life in a country become endangered and force out large sections of people to foreign lands that hold out prospects of better and more secure living. Population shift from one part of the same country to another in such contingencies as natural and man-made disasters, ecological imbalances, environmental degradations and inter-ethnic and inter-religious clashes etc. is also migration. But the focus of the present analysis is confined to the problem of sustained immigration at a massive scale from Bangladesh to India.

A Two-way Process

As an international process, migration is a constant two-way movement in and out of each state. No country is solely a land of immigration or emigration. The scale of inter-state population movement is much smaller in countries that control emigration and/or is unattractive to immigrants relative to rich democracies. The reasons for people moving between countries vary, but a combination of push and pull factors determine the nature and scale of migration and the migrants' destinations. People of a country immigrate to other countries to escape political, social and religious persecutions or to improve their economic conditions. Opportunities for a better and more stable livelihood for themselves and good prospects for their children are powerful pull factors. Prosperous democracies with good human rights records like the United States, Canada, Australia, the UK and other West European countries are the most preferred destinations of migrants from all over the globe. But decades of uncontrolled illegal immigration from Bangladesh to India have acquired the proportions of a demographic invasion.

Implications

The presence of 15 to 20 million aliens, besides signalling a total breakdown of border management and immigration control, has imposed a crushing socio-economic burden on the country and is posing a serious threat to national security. At the same time, the cynical and insistent denial of the very existence of illegal immigration by Dhaka is an indication of the extent of its non-cooperation in addressing the problem. This has added a sinister dimension to the none-too- happy Indo-Bangladesh relations.

Push and Pull Factors

In Bangladesh, unrelenting persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, and marginalization of landless rural masses are powerful push factors that drive people out of their homeland. At the other end of the spectrum, pull factors in India like job opportunities, access to public distribution system, social security benefits, free educational and health facilities, enlistment as voters and, above all, congenial socio-cultural atmosphere constitute a magnet for prospective migrants. The high stakes of some political parties in captive immigrant vote banks, unbridled corruption in the BSF and organized rackets on both sides of the border promote cross-border infiltration.

Untenable Disclaimer

Dhaka's disclaimer of the problem is easily rubbished. By analyzing the 1991 Bangladesh census data Sarifa Begum, a Bangladeshi demographer, showed that the estimate of 104.7 million (1991) total population had excluded from the computation 9 to 10 million people. The census figure was at odds with the Bangladesh government's own projection of 112-114 millions and the UNDP estimate of 116-117 millions. The demographer rightly attributed the "missing millions" to unrecorded out-migration.

Clearly, no fewer than 14 to 15 millions had sneaked into India during the 1981-91 inter-census decade. The much higher growth rates in the Indian districts bordering Bangladesh and significantly lower

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growth rates in the adjoining Bangladesh areas, extremely low growth in Hindu-concentrated districts and population explosion in urban pockets of West Bengal confirmed the finding.

Some statistics tellingly illustrate the point:

- Greater Jessore and Greater Khulna districts (Bangladesh) registered 1.97 and 1.58 per cent growth respectively as against 3.16 per cent in the adjoining North 24 Parganas.
- Greater Mymensingh district (Bangladesh) had a growth rate of 1.82 per cent against 3.84 per cent in the adjacent Eastern Garo Hills district (Meghalaya).
- Greater Comilla district (Bangladesh) showed 1.89 per cent growth against 3.36 per cent in Tipura.
- Population explosion in many semi-urban areas of West Bengal, i.e., Gobardanga-8.64 per cent, Khardah-9.50, Raiganj-13.93, Ashoknagar-7.45, Mekhliganj-7.98 and Tufanganj-22.45 per cent against the 2.45 per cent state average.
- Sharply lower growth against the national average (2.02 per cent) in the Hindu-concentrated districts of Bangladesh: Baisal (1.2), Gopalganj(0.9), Munshiganj (1.1), Faridpur(1.2), Chandpur (1.2), Khulna (1.6) confirming heavy Hindu exodus.
- Sharp fall in the number of Stranded Bihari Muslims (who had opted for Pakistan after the liberation of Bangladesh) from 1.1 million in 1971 to 2,50,000 in 1991. The missing 8,50,000 found their way to greater Calcutta and Katihar-Purnea-Samastipur belt of Bihar.

Sharp Decline in Hindu Population

Bangladesh census statistics clearly reveal sharp decline in the percentage of Hindu population in the last six decades confirming continuous out-migration of that category of Bangladeshi citizenry.

Table 1
Percentage Distribution of Population by Religious Communities (1981-1991)

Census Year	Total	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Christian	Others
1941	100	70.3	28.0	NA	0.1	1.6
1951	100	76.9	22.0	0.7	0.3	0.1
1961	100	80.4	18.5	0.7	0.3	0.1
1974	100	85.4	13.5	0.6	0.3	0.2
1981	100	86.7	12.1	0.6	0.3	0.3
1991	100	88.3	10.5	0.6	0.3	0.3

The percentage variations of the composition of Muslim population between the census years 1941 to 1951 and 1961 to 1974 work out to 6.6 and 5.0 per cent points respectively. During the 1941-91 period, the proportion of Hindu population declined from 28 per cent to 12.4 per cent. The Bangladesh Census Report (1991) identified migration of Hindus since 1947 as a major factor for the decline in Hindu population. According to the 2001 census, for the same reason, the Hindu population further declined to 10.5 per cent. Currently it is estimated to be around 8.5 per cent. Prior to 1947, job seekers from East Bengal used to come to Calcutta and the relatively thinly populated Assam and North Bengal districts. In the immediate post-partition years, a pervasive insecurity pushed Hindus in droves to West Bengal and other border states in Northeast India.

Since the 1974 famine in Bangladesh, Muslims migrating to India far outnumber the Hindu immigrants, roughly at 1:3 ratio. This has changed the demography and communal balance of the border population, generating inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions. In West Bengal, many Hindus of remote border villages have been relocating themselves in towns for better security and protection. Migration to border states having reached the saturation point, many migrants, mostly Muslim, have moved to urban centres in other states in search of wider

job opportunities. Illegal Muslim immigrants have been living in large concentrations in Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Ajmer, Lucknow and many other cities and towns of the northern and western states. Many of these migrants often clandestinely visit Pakistan.

Trappings of Citizenship

Armed with all the trappings of Indian citizenship- ration cards, local birth and domicile certificates, voter identity card etc. the second generation immigrants are no longer content with the underclass status of their families. They have set higher sights for themselves. Many have joined government services including the police and para-military organizations, armed forces and even other sensitive security agencies. For a variety of reasons, the relationship between the migrants and the indigenous population is embroiled in mutual suspicion and hostility:

- a) Despite long stay in this country, the Bangladeshi migrants, especially the Muslims, maintain their separate identity and do not easily integrate with the indigenous mainstream.
- b) Migrants travel to India with the attitudes, mores and values of their land of origin and stick to them. In the eyes of the indigenous people, they remain “unreconstructed aliens.” According to a survey made by the Washington-based Pew Research Institute, 58 per cent of the Bangladeshi Muslims believe that suicidal bombing is justified for safeguarding Islam. Immigrants holding such extremist views pose a serious danger to the safety and security of the country.
- c) As long as the migrants are content with their underclass status and occupations, the potential for inter-ethnic conflicts remain within manageable limits, but when they or their children start competing for more dignified jobs, the undercurrent of resentment among the sons of the soil surfaces.
- d) The fear among the local populace of losing their distinctive national identity generates strong social pressures against the migrants.

Threat to Sovereignty and National Security

The fact that around 15 per cent of the Bangladesh population is in India underscores significant erosion of national sovereignty in that India has no say in who comes and who stays in this country. In Assam and West Bengal, votes by foreigners decisively influence election results in an increasingly large number of parliamentary and state assembly constituencies. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the spirit of *jihad* in Bangladesh have turned the illegal immigrants into a potent source of subversion in India. In the early nineties, a section of pseudo-left Bangladeshi intellectuals had demanded lebensraum or living space for their country's excess population in the sparsely populated Northeast. At least two heavyweights in Begum Zia's first government (one is a cabinet minister in her present cabinet) had openly espoused that demand, which was in line with the maverick mass leader Maulana Bhashani's dream of a 'Greater Bengal'.

Pragmatic Approach Needed

There can be no two opinions that all political, economic and strategic considerations point to the urgency of getting rid of the illegal immigrants, but it is next to impossible to deport all the resident aliens en masse. Any such attempt could end up in endless litigation, physical resistance, tensions with Bangladesh and much else. A more pragmatic approach would be to aim at preventing further infiltration and concentrate on deporting in phases the relatively new arrivals who are yet to strike roots in India and still have family links and material interests in Bangladesh. Much will depend on the government's ability to take the public on board.

Besides building a national consensus on the imperative of a comprehensive and co-coordinated action plan other immediate priorities are:

- a) A time-bound exhaustive census of the illegal immigrant population and identification of their locations.
- b) Streamlining the border management and immigration control regimes focused on smashing of organized immigration and

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smuggling rackets by liberal use of the powers of preventive detention under the National Security Act. India's policy must not be an obstacle to be overcome by bonafide travellers and businesses, but has to be instead a critical tool for protecting our national interests. There is no more important a defensive weapon in our arsenal than a well-functioning immigration system. We neglect it at our peril.

- c) Crash implementation of the border-fencing programme as the most effective component of the restructured border management and immigration control system.
- d) Disciplining the BSF with special emphasis on weeding out of the corrupt. The force leadership at the top must be shown the door, should they fail to carry out the cleansing act within a given deadline.
- e) Creating a separate immigration service and putting in place a long-term national immigration policy.
- f) Sustained diplomacy be geared to enlisting the widest possible international support for containment of illegal immigration and deportation of the immigrants and launching commensurate public education campaigns at home and abroad.
- g) Blunting the "pull factors" by creating safeguards against immigrants' access to unintended benefits like ration cards, admission to educational institutions, enlistment as voters etc and safeguards against employment and acquisition of immovable property.

International Support Needed

While taking every possible step to prevent illegal immigration, India, in co-ordination with the international community, must help Bangladesh to become a place where "people want to live rather than leave". To stem the flow of economic migrants, India has to persuade donor countries and international agencies to earmark a part of their aid to Bangladesh for special projects geared to creating employment opportunities in the economically lean and migration-prone areas. At the same time, India must use all its leverage including humanitarian

intervention to ensure that Dhaka creates appropriate conditions for its religious and ethnic minorities to live in peace as equal citizens along side the majority Muslim.

Conclusion

Securing India against the menace of illegal immigration is too complex and daunting a task to be accomplished by any simplistic half measures. Implementation of even a modest plan outlined above would need to be based on a national consensus, strong political will, an unrelenting immigration and border management regime and focused diplomacy on a sustained basis. While the strategic measures outlined above could minimize the impact of the “push factors,” effective steps need to be taken urgently to blunt the “pull factors”:

- a) Safeguards against easy access to certain unintended benefits like ration cards, admission to educational institutions etc.
- b) Safeguards against acquisition of immovable property.
- c) Safeguards against inclusion in voters’ list.
- d) Administrative and legal safeguards against employment.

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INDIA AND BANGLADESH: THE BORDER ISSUES

Sreeradha Datta

India and Bangladesh are neighbours with the longest land boundary between them in South Asia. Besides sharing common history, geography and cultural heritage they also share one of the largest bilateral trade in the region. While not being adversarial as in the case of Indo-Pakistan relations, Indo-Bangladesh relations are anything but cordial. Bilateral problems between the two countries are many which continue to irritate each other. This paper seeks to discuss and delineate the border dispute, the uncertainties and suspicions that arise out of a land-border of 4,096 kms. and a maritime border of 180 kms.¹ Porous borders have proved to be conducive for flow of illegal migration, insurgency, extremism, illegal trade and smuggling.

UN-DEMARCATED BORDERS

The first problem with the common border is that of non-demarcation of a 6.5 km land border along the Comilla-Tripura area. It is a historical legacy that has arisen out of difficulties in drawing boundaries as delineated by Sir Cyril Radcliffe. The border in certain stretches was demarcated along straight lines without taking into consideration ground realities and thus resulting in the division of one village between the two nations. The un-demarcated land border is spread over into three sectors which on the Indian side fall in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. In the Assam sector (2.5 kms), India insists on applying the original gadestal map of 1915-16 of Dhumabari as the basis for demarcation. Bangladesh on the other hand insists on Theodolite Traverse Data as the basis for demarcation, whereby Bangladesh could claim three villages for itself giving India two villages. With regards to the West Bengal sector (1.5 kms), both sides agree on using Sui River as the demarcation; but India insists on the current flow of the River, while Bangladesh insists on earlier flow which would give the Daikhata area to Bangladesh. Similarly in Tripura sector

(2.5 kms) due to change in the course of Muhuri River and the formation of Shashaner Char of about 46 acres which remains under Indian territory, Bangladesh is unwilling to apply the present river course as the boundary line. The disagreements stem from the fact that each would have to give up small portions of land which are at present in their respective possession.

There is a popular perception especially in Bangladesh that India has not been serious about the Indira-Mujib agreement as India has yet to ratify the agreement.² Even though Bangladesh has ratified it, the agreement is yet to be made a legal order through a gazette notification. India seems to be stuck over the issue of a constitutional amendment to endorse boundary changes. This, however, is not possible till complete demarcation of the border is done. Both India and Bangladesh are agrarian societies with one of the lowest man: land ratio in South Asia. Rural Bangladesh continues to remain below poverty line and suffers from severe unemployment opportunities. Population density of Bangladesh is 665 person per sq km. while that of India is 237; Bangladesh's per capita income is US\$144, as against India's US\$ 327, the inequities between the two countries are rather self explanatory. Given the paucity of land and the pressure of population on both sides, neither state is willing to forgo an acre more than necessary. So long as the question of demarcation is not resolved, India would be unable to ratify the Indira-Mujib agreement of 1974. The maritime borders pose a different kind of problems because the shifting river routes, soil erosion or frequent floods give way to numerous temporary *chars* and islands making it difficult to demarcate borders. River line borders tend to change course periodically leading to a host of disputes, associated with the difficulties in establishing ownership of the newly created territories. For example, in the 1980s controversies surrounding sovereignty over New Moore island dominated Indo-Bangladesh relations which still remains disputed and unresolved.

The undemarcated border question is accompanied by three inter-related disputes, namely, enclaves, adverse possessions and presence of villages closer to international borders. India has 111 enclaves in

Bangladesh (17,258.24 acres), whereas the latter has 51 (7,083.72 acres) inside India.³ The problem of enclaves is a legacy of the two Kings of Cooch Behar in North Bengal (India) and Rangpur in South Bengal (Bangladesh). The rajas would play a game of cards with pieces of land as their stakes and pockets of land in one area were thus acquired by the other. The enclaves are also called *chitmahal* in West Bengal and as the legend goes it acquired the name from the *chits* or pieces of paper on which land would be pledged or also from the fact the *chit* in Bengali means a part of the whole and *mahal* being land. Though the enclaves are physically and geographically isolated, yet these are part of the mainland. But these enclaves suffer from lack of any government institutions and arrangements and are thus often referred to as 'stateless people'. Rogue criminal elements from either side take advantage of the situation in the adverse possession of enclaves which lacks any administrative structure.

Till 1971 the residents were allowed to move freely to their respective mainland when Indo-Pak tensions restricted their movement. The population continues to suffer the complications of being a citizen of a particular country and forced to be residing in another. Given the fact that about 1,50,000 persons in these enclaves need to be relocated,⁴ the lack of will to resolve the issue appears incomprehensible. Time and again media reports from both countries draw attention to the atrocities that the residents of these areas have been forced to undergo either from the security personnel or from criminals who use the situation to their advantage. The disputes over enclaves raise questions about the residency rights of the inhabitants and the statelessness of the inhabitants often takes the form of lawlessness.⁵ However, in March 2003, India decided to issue identity cards to the residents of the Indian enclaves in Bangladesh.⁶ Another aspect of the border problem is land in adverse possession (Indian land in Bangladesh's possession) and land in reverse possession (Bangladesh's land in Indian possession). Thirty-four pieces of Indian land/holding (2853.1 acres) are under Bangladesh's possession, while 40 pieces (2154.56 acres) of Bangladesh's land are under Indian possession. This again has been a

source of regular tension and conflicts between the border security forces of the two countries. This periodic tension manifested into a major crisis in April 2001. The border clash in Pyriduwah, Meghalaya resulted in the death of 16 BSF personnel when Bangladeshi Rifles (BDR) overran an Indian post. Although there have been renewed attempts since then to resolve the demarcation issue and the question of adverse possessions, nothing has changed on the ground. Day-to-day border tensions continue despite several 'fruitful' flag meetings, regular meetings of the Joint Working Groups (JWG) and a couple of MOUs signed between border forces of India (BSF) and Bangladesh (BDR), the latest one signed in May 2003.

Another problem that remains on the border is that over 60 villages remain in between the Indo-Bangla border road (IBB) and the border fencing. Thus, the presence of these villages beyond the causes both operational as well as existential problems for both the BSF as well as the local population. Besides, the porous and undemarcated nature of the border has largely contributed to the flow of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, thereby affecting the socio-political conditions of Indian states bordering Bangladesh.

MIGRATION PROBLEM

The issue of illegal Bangladeshi migrants to India has been a major pre-occupation of demographers, sociologists, academicians, security analysts and most importantly political parties. At the time of the partition there was a large exodus of Hindus from East Pakistan who chose to make India their home. Difficult circumstances and unfavourable political conditions under the domination of Pakistani Punjabi regime further led to the subsequent migrations. About 5.3 million non-Muslim minorities from East Pakistan are estimated to have crossed over to India during 1946-1970.⁸ Another large exodus occurred in 1971 just before the Bangladesh liberation war had begun, with 10 million Bengalis taking shelter in India.⁹ Unlike the 1947 and 1971 refugees, there are no proper estimates of those Bangladeshis, Hindus and Muslims alike, who surreptitiously have been entering India.

Some of the broad estimates of this influx are discussed below:

Northeast States

Assam was first rocked by the foreigner issue way back in early 1980s and it was only in 1985 that the Centre was able to come to an agreement with All India Assam Students Union (AASU), the party in the forefront of the agitation. While this issue continues to plague the State, several studies have been done to estimate the numbers of illegal Bangladeshis residing in Assam. One of the accepted and much quoted figures has been contained in 1998 report of the Governor of Assam on *Illegal Migration in Assam* submitted to the President of India. It offers a detailed study on the growing Muslim population in the State, especially in the districts that are adjoining the borders.¹⁰ According to historian and demographer Barpujari, there has been a substantial increase of Muslim population in Assam during the past 20 years. According to the 1991 census Muslim population has grown by 77.42 per cent as against 41.89 per cent of the Hindus. He also points out that four districts - Dhubri, Barpeta, Galpara and Hailakandi have become Muslim-majority districts. Some demographers estimated the influx of Bangladeshi migrants during 1981-91 into Assam to be at 158,639.¹¹ As a result of these demographic changes, immigrants hold the balance in 40 out of 126 Assembly seats in Assam Legislative Assembly.¹²

In Arunachal Pradesh, Muslim population has increased by 135 per cent in the last ten years.¹³

In Meghalaya, the Muslim population, which was around 26,000 in 1921, rose to 61,000 in 1991 due to migration from across the borders.¹⁴

In Tripura, the demographic shift is even more obvious. Whereas in 1947, tribes constituted 93 per cent of the total population, but in 1991 they came down to make up only 28.5 per cent. During 1981-91 at least 42,811 migrants moved into the state.¹⁵

Nagaland has more than 10,000 Bangladeshis.¹⁶

Meghalaya has more than 10,000 Bangladeshis.¹⁷

West Bengal

In West Bengal, which shares a common cultural-linguistic identity with Bangladesh, the picture is rather blurred. Yet it is possible to arrive at some tentative estimates. Between 1972 and 1996, as much as 1.2 million Bangladeshis came to West Bengal, but never went back.¹⁸ According to another study, the population growth of the border districts of West Bengal namely, South Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia and North 24 Parganas ranges from 22 per cent to 25 per cent and is noticeably above the State's average growth rate of 18 per cent.¹⁹ According to another estimate, between 1981 and 1991 West Bengal witnessed the influx of 8,50,982 Bangladeshi migrants.²⁰ An internal note prepared by India's Home Ministry maintained: "According to the figures available (in 1987) with the Government of West Bengal, the total number of Bangladeshi illegal migrants in the State was around 4.4 million. It should be near about five million today [that is, March 1992]."²¹ Others put the figure between 10-17 million.²² In 1996 an Indian para-military official claimed that "about one thousand Bangladeshis cross the border into India each day."²³ According to a study, the Bangladeshi immigrants are in a position to determine the outcome in 52 assembly seat while in another 100 seats they are able to significantly influence it.²⁴

Other States

Although most of the illegal migrants enter through the borders in West Bengal and Northeast region, they have spread themselves over a large area in the country encompassing many cities including Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, and different parts of Bihar. In Delhi itself there is an estimated population of 300,000 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. Their presence in Mumbai has led to demands by the Shiv Sena to push them back to Bangladesh. Studies by demographers all over the country that prove beyond doubt that India has absorbed over 15 million Bangladeshi immigrants.²⁵ In January 2003, Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani put the number of Bangladeshi migrants in India at around 20 million.²⁶ The Intelligence Bureau puts the over all

number at 16 million.²⁷ A task force on Border Management reported in August 2000 that the number stood at 15 million.²⁸

Despite several studies and statistics it is difficult to provide for accurate figures as there has been a great deal of 'political opportunism' in the matter. For example, while there is a widespread belief and understanding that Assam was bearing the brunt of a large exodus of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, the Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia argued that Assam's population growth was only marginal and was lower than the national average.²⁹ This is symptomatic of the problem that affects the Indian polity at present where major political parties are unwilling to risk the alienation of migrants who over the years have evolved into a powerful vote bank. In Assam for instance, AGP that transformed itself into a political party with 'foreigner issue' as its main plank, was unable to address the problem. Similarly in West Bengal, despite evidence of the presence of large number of illegal migrants the ruling Left-Front government has been unwilling to address the issue of illegal migrants.

The problem has been made complex because people living in low lying areas along rivers often move up towards the mainland during floods and this internally displaced population is often termed as illegal migrants.³⁰ On the other hand, there have been instances of Bangladeshis augmenting their numbers especially in the Char region by the practice of giving the names of relatives in Bangladesh at the time of enumeration. When their names appear in the voters list, they inform their relatives in Bangladesh to enter Assam.³¹

The problem of definition continues to plague the discourse on migrants. Both Hindus and Muslims from Bangladesh (though the number of Muslims is much larger given their population strength) have been entering India for the same economic reasons. Besides, there are Hindus affected by communal violence, who are forced to cross into India to escape threats to their lives. By and large Muslims are economic migrants who are seeking better economic opportunities across the border. Often both kinds of migrants are treated at par and therein lays the problem.³²

There are Hindus who despite having lived in India even for the last four decades insist that they are refugees and be treated accordingly. The state governments of Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal have embarked on the task of overlooking these claims.³³ Instead of expelling them, West Bengal Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerji has stressed the need to treat the new entrants differently from other economic migrants from Bangladesh and to ensure their safe return to and resettlement in Bangladesh.³⁴ Reflecting these sentiments, on 5 December 2001, Union Home Minister L.K. Advani, assured the Lok Sabha that those who have already crossed to India would be dealt with “compassion and understanding” in view of the circumstances preceding their migration.³⁵ The discourse on illegal migrants has now been further complicated with the usage of the term infiltrators-meaning ‘intruder with hostile intent’.³⁶ This shift is more of a reflection of the security problems that have begun to arise given the violence, militancy and terror attacks that are taking place especially in the areas with a large migrant population.

The large scale growth of Muslim population in areas bordering Bangladesh has led to evolution of a number of militant groups. In the Northeast alone, at least 18 separate Islamist militant groups have so far been identified by security agencies and most of them operate in Assam. These include the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), People’s United Liberation Front (PULF),³⁷ Students’ Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), Adam Sena, ‘Jihad’ Council, and many such organisations. The Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam is an umbrella organisation floated by a number of separate outfits to carry out their activities in a concerted manner. Most of these groups are based in Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta and Nalbari districts in lower Assam, Nagaon and Marigaon districts of central Assam and Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of southern Assam’s Barak valley, besides the Char (alluvial islands) areas in the Brahmaputra river.³⁸

Media reports suggest that the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) has started several lucrative income-generating

projects in Bangladesh to sustain its anti-India activities in this country. These include three hotels, a private clinic and two motor driving schools in Dhaka, a number of grocery and drug stores in Sylhet, poultry farms in Mymensingh, and two schools in Narsingdi.³⁹

The unprecedented haul of high power explosives from the Sealdah station and two other places of West Bengal was preceded by one of the worst train mishaps at Gaisal and the powerful blast at the New Jalpaiguri railway station in June 1999. That the shipment originated in Bangladesh, or was at least transited through it, confirms the suspicion that anti-India insurgent groups are backed and funded by ISI operating from Bangladesh soil. In connection with the January 2002 American Centre shoot out incident, the Delhi Police arrested a Bangladeshi national, Syed Abu Nasir, a top *Lashkar-e-Toiba* activist alleged to have supervised the operation as well as some other Bangladeshis from interiors of West Bengal. The number of *Madrassas* has also been increasing in the region.⁴⁰

Smuggling through the border is also a cause of concern for both the countries. The items that are smuggled out from India includes saris, garments, spices, cosmetics, crockery, artificial jewellery, phensidyl, etc. Goods smuggled to India include Hilsa shrimps, toilet soaps, household articles made of brass and copper. The value of such illegal trade is estimated to exceed the formal trade between the two countries.

REMEDIAL MEASURES

The Bangladeshi government has adopted a consistent position that its citizens do not migrate to India illegally. Whether under civilian or military rule, Dhaka has maintained that because the problem 'does not exist', there is nothing to discuss.⁴¹ It tends to benefit from this denial in two ways:

a) Given the nature of migration, the migrants are not a brain drain to Bangladesh. On the contrary, the large-scale outward movement of population would ease the pressure on land and there is a significant flow of remittance from such migrants who find jobs in India.

b) If Bangladesh were to admit migration of its population to India, then it would be asked to take back those identified by India as illegal aliens. Since the number of such illegal migrants could be rather high, Bangladesh has resorted to the denial strategy.

Some Bangladeshi scholars/academicians agree with the prevailing Indian position concerning illegal migration.⁴² Given the lack of acknowledgement let alone response from Bangladesh, it is essential for India to take a few unilateral measures to deal with the problem posed by illegal migrants. Even if one were to question the efficacy of some of these methods, it is essential to remember that India is still grappling with the issue and has been unable to come up with any sure and effective mechanism.

In 1987 India decided to build a fence along the Indo-Bangladesh international border. Bangladesh perceived it to be “an unfair” move.⁴³ Because the fences are to be built on Indian soil with Indian resources, there is very little Bangladesh can do to stop the process. Initially this endeavour was meant to be completed by 1997, but the work did not move along as planned. The border fence project has now entered phase two, with the government estimating a sum of Rs. 847 crore for the 2,429.5 kms. fencing with 2007 being the new deadline for completion. Critics of fencing as a solution to the problem have argued:

a) A fence could keep out animals but not human beings, unless a large number of guards were deployed along and this in turn would be highly expensive.

b) Terrain along the international border would impede proper and effective fencing. In certain areas the fence would pass through thickly populated areas on both sides and without an inch of no-man’s land in some areas, it would have to pass through houses.⁴⁴

c) Most of illegal migrants use the riverine routes rather than the land routes and hence fencing would not achieve its primary purpose of blocking illegal migration; and

d) It is widely recognised that migration takes place through ‘agents who organise crossing points, transport, accommodation and bribes for border officials where necessary.’⁴⁵ The effectiveness of the border fence and the huge costs (Rs 139.79 crore already spent) has thus been doubted as a lasting solution.

ILLEGAL MIGRANTS (DETERMINATION BY TRIBUNAL) ACT (IMDT)

In the Assam accord of 1985 it was agreed that 1 January 1966 was to be the base year and date for the purpose of detection of a foreigner. Those who came to India after that date and till 24 March 1971 would be detected and their names struck off from the electoral rolls. Those who came after March 1971 shall be detected and expelled in accordance with the law. The IMDT Act introduced in 1983 was expected to make this detection possible and wherever necessary lead to possible deportation. By IMDT provision the onus of proving a foreigner lies with the person bringing in the complaint. But over the years this regulation has not been even effective in bringing about detection and/or deportation of foreigners.

During the period from 1985 to 2000, the Border Police wing of the Assam Police initiated 3,19,109 inquiries under the IMDT Act and 3,14,519 of the inquiries were completed. The police referred 3,07,407 inquiries to the screening committees and 43,255 cases were referred to the tribunals. During the period, the tribunals disposed off only 18,184 cases, declaring 10,181 persons as illegal migrants and out of them only 1,491 of them were expelled from the country.⁴⁶ The Supreme Court in August 2000 had ordered the Central government to repeal the Act by January 2001. The order has not yet been complied with. The Central government claimed that it was unable to repeal the Act due to lack of a consensus on the issue in Parliament. This provision was only applicable to Assam and despite attempts to repeal this Act, the Assam government under Congress Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi has been unwilling to go ahead with the Centre’s decision. In the 1946 Foreigners Act, the onus is on the individual to prove that he is not a foreigner

thus placing the power to detect and push back aliens in the hands of the state police rather than the judiciary, as is the case under the IMDT. The matter at present remains far from settled.

Deportation

In keeping with the tough stand that the government of India wished to take vis-à-vis the Bangladeshi illegal migrants, deportation is another such method to deal with the problem. The deportation of Bangladeshis has remained a contentious issue in India and political parties have often taken contrary stands on the issue. Most political parties in India describe the controversy surrounding Bangladeshi migrants as an anti-Muslim agenda of the Hindu right. Such partisan attitude at times encourages illegal migrants to throttle the efforts of the state to seek their identification and repatriation. Viewing the illegal migrants as potential supporters and vote banks, political parties tend to preserve the status quo of the migrants and are not keen to take a stand on the illegal presence of non-Indians.

In 1998 the ruling Shiv Sena government in Maharashtra decided to deport Bangladeshi zari workers leading to strong protests from the Left Front government in West Bengal who claimed that the train full of deportees were indeed Bengali speaking Muslim residents of West Bengal. When the BJP-ruled Delhi government tried to act against the migrants in June 2000, the latter “hit back and a riot erupted.”⁴⁷ It is only recently that there has been a convergence of views among the right wing parties with that of Left Front Governments of Tripura and West Bengal over the deportation issue. At the Chief Ministers meeting on internal security in February 2003, West Bengal Chief Minister admitted: ‘on the question of dealing with illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh, our state government is in agreement with Government of India that whenever such infiltration is detected, the foreign nationals should be pushed back forthwith.’ Thus some sort of consensus is emerging on the issue of illegal migrants.

Bilaterally this issue continues to boil. In the February 2003 Satgachi outpost episode, 213 Bangladeshis were stranded in no man’s

land in Cooch Behar area and it was only after a few days of ordeal that they were eventually allowed into Bangladesh. The initial reaction of Bangladesh Border force in this incident as in others has been one of strong denial. According to bilateral agreements, under certain conditions both countries are bound to accept the repatriation of their nationals. But dispute is far from over and cursory scanning of Bangladeshi newspapers would reveal that the issue is alive generating wide attention in Bangladesh. Hardly a day goes by without a reference to Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) refusing entry of the so called 'push in' attempts by the Border Security Force of India (BSF).

Work permits and National Identity Cards

Confronted with political as well as legal problems, India of late has been considering the issue of "work permits to Bangladeshi migrants suspected to be foreigners but could not be evicted due to a host of legal and constitutional problems."⁴⁸ In a bid to counter large-scale employment of illegal migrants, national identity cards are also on the anvil now. National identity cards are to be issued in 13 States in order to combat the "serious threat" to internal security caused by Bangladeshi and Pakistani immigrants. The States concerned are Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat, Uttaranchal, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Tripura, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Pondicherry and Delhi. Many consider the work permit as the best way out under the given circumstances to ensure a certain kind of accountability, even though there are some dissenting notes.⁴⁹ But the difficulties in working out the modalities is compounding the issue. Essentially the need of the hour is to check further in flow of illegal migrants first.

PROBLEM OF INSURGENTS

Another thorny bilateral issue that has assumed larger significance in recent years is that of Indian insurgents using Bangladesh as their base. The porous borders and easy accessibility has made Bangladesh very conducive for various Indian insurgents to operate from Bangladesh. Since the formation of this country, India has been accusing

Dhaka of facilitating, encouraging and supporting a number of northeast insurgent groups. According to the Government of India estimates, at present there are 99 camps of northeastern insurgents operating from Bangladesh and 88 insurgent leaders who are housed in different parts of Bangladesh. The Indian position is that some of the North Eastern insurgent groups like the NSCN, ULFA, NDFB, Meitei extremist groups, ATTF and NLFT have developed trans-border linkages in Bangladesh.⁵⁰

Chief Ministers of most of the Northeastern states are of the firm opinion that the militant activities continue in the northeast as the insurgents are able to operate freely from Bangladeshi soil. According to the former Chief Minister of Assam, Prafulla Mohanta, militants belonging to the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and other insurgent outfits are taking shelter in Bangladesh. In mid-1999 the ISI men arrested by the police also came to Assam through Bangladesh.⁵¹ Similarly, in July 1999, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar pointed out that the porous border between India and Bangladesh has been used by the insurgent groups for movement to and from their camps.⁵²

There are numerous media reports suggesting that ULFA has several lucrative income-generating projects in Bangladesh to sustain its insurgency activities in India. And despite the fact that ULFA leader Anup Chetia and two of his associates were under house arrest, they have been allowed to roam free despite the jail terms handed down by the Bangladeshi courts. The National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) that has spearheaded the anti-Bengali agitation in Tripura has its bases in the Sajek range of CHT.⁵³ An insurgent group Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), consisting of Rajbangshis, is fighting for a separate state of Kamtapur and is operating close to the Bangladeshi enclaves in India. KLO has developed strong links with a number of militant groups in the Northeast as well as with the ISI.⁵⁴

The position of the Awami League and the BNP over the question of support for Indian insurgents has been somewhat uneven. Awami League has been perceived to be more sympathetic towards India. In

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December 1997 ULFA leader Anup Chetia was arrested when he tried to illegally enter Bangladesh. Even though he has not been extradited to India, Bangladesh rejected his demand for asylum and sentenced him to a six-year prison term. Sanjeev Deb Barman, a senior All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) member, who was illegally staying in Bangladesh since 1993 was arrested in 1998 by the Sheikh Hasina government. As India was seeking his extradition, in January 2002 the Begum Khaleda government released him on bail. Soon after Barman quickly applied for political asylum. Following Barman's example Anup Chetia, had also sought political asylum.⁵⁵

Easy availability of weapons in Bangladesh as was revealed in the 'Operation Clean Heart' in late 2002 when over 500 weapons were recovered during the countrywide anti-crime raids, strengthened India's fear of the northeast insurgents having easy access to these weapons. The rise of extremist elements within Bangladesh borders is also not an isolated phenomenon. Beginning with the March 2001 visit of US President Clinton to Bangladesh, various reports suggest that *Al Qaida* fugitives have been operating in Bangladesh and that there is a growing nexus between the *Al Qaida* and the religious extremist elements in Bangladesh.⁵⁶ According to some reports, *Harkat ul-Jihad Islami* (HUJI) of Bangladesh is the lynchpin of *Al Qaida* operations in Bangladesh. Given its serious implications both for Bangladesh as well as for India's regional security environment, New Delhi has been pressurizing Dhaka to rein in these elements operating from Bangladesh. The recent banning of *Shahdat-e-Al-Hikma*, a newly-formed outfit that claims West Bengal as part of Bangladesh and is funded by underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, is a significant endeavour in this direction.⁵⁷

The border problems between India and Bangladesh are many and varied, more so given the nature of complicated terrain. While the inherent physical impediments shall take time to be worked out, the lack of understanding between each other hinders the betterment of bilateral relations. Stereotypes of big bully continue to be raised while insensitivity to neighbours' concerns continues. The need, therefore, is to build trust and keep the dialogue continuing between the two sides

and sensitize each other about what is of concern to either side. From the Indian perspective the security concerns are uppermost and its linkage with the migration issue needs to be tackled.

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BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

From Bitterness to Warmth

Smruti S. Pattanaik

Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan have travelled through a topsy-turvy path. Based on high emotions dating back to the pre-separation days have coloured Bangladesh's perception of Pakistan. The bitterness still exists combined with shared aspiration that was inherent due to the common past in the context of their struggle to establish a separate political entity for the Muslims of the sub-continent. Former East Pakistan's "role in the creation of Pakistan was also a historical fact. The original Lahore resolution was moved by Abdul Kasem Fazlul Haq, a Bengali Muslim leader...Bengal was the only province where the Muslim League was voted to power, thus providing Muslim League with a political power base."¹ Though Bangladesh has come a long way since 1971 but some of the unresolved issues between the two countries still open up old wounds. Some of the unresolved issues dating back to 1971 have been the major stumbling block for closer relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Added to this is the demand by Bangladesh to tender an apology for the 1971 killings by the Pakistan army. At the same time the religious identity and Pakistan as a possible counterbalance to India constitute core-determining factor in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. Simultaneously Bangladesh has clarified that the Indians should not misconstrue its relations with Pakistan. The Bangladesh polity is deeply divided between the elements that advocate strong fraternal ties between the two Islamic countries of the region and those who oppose such cooperation given the political history and repression of the Bengali freedom fighters by the Pakistan military regime. Therefore, apart from geographical factors that separate both the countries by miles of Indian territory, the divided polity has impeded the forward movement in their relations.

Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan cannot be understood in isolation of historical factors and especially the years that followed the

1971 separation. Pakistan was perceived as a colonial master exploiting the potential of Bangladesh and has converted the eastern flank as a supplier of raw material to feed the West Pakistan bourgeoisie. The East Pakistanis' aspirations regarding land reforms and participatory politics severely threatened entrenched interests of the West Pakistani military bureaucratic elites. Moreover, the numerical superiority of the East Pakistanis was also a potential threat to the power base of West Pakistan. Therefore, it seemed a prudent alternative for the West Pakistani elites to give their support to the military takeover in 1958. However, what added to their firm belief in the military takeover is the fact that the Muslim League was headed by people who had no socio-political roots in the geographical region that formed Pakistan. Therefore electoral politics was an anathema to the governing elites of West Pakistan. Political aspirations of the East Pakistanis were viewed as being inspired by Pakistan's enemy. To quote Federal Communication Minister Abdur Rab Nishtar, "regional patriotism [is] simply repugnant to Islam. Pakistan was established on the basis that Muslims were one nation and the tendency to think in terms of Bengali, Punjabi and Bihari would undermine the very foundation of Pakistan.... These disruptive ideas [are] being spread by enemies of Pakistan who [are] working as fifth columnists among the Muslims."²

The insecurities emerging out of the circumstances under which Pakistan was created, the uncertainty regarding its actual creation for a very long time and later the doubts over the economic and political viability of the new state did impinge on the centrifugal forces to deny regionalism to express itself and allow its political roots to germinate. However, at the same time the self-interest of the political elites took refuge under threat to the unity of Pakistan as a mask to masquerade their interests to hold on to power. What added to the woes of East Pakistanis was the imposition of language and lack of economic development in the Eastern flank. Pakistan's refusal to devalue its currency affected East Pakistan adversely economically since it was dependent on India which had devalued its currency. The jute export to India got affected and the economy suffered as a result. The West

Pakistani elites in their effort in nation building in terms of two nation theory tried to impose Arabic script initially since it was considered as a religious language, though later the emphasis was put more on Urdu as the language of Pakistan. Efforts were made to write Bengali in the Arabic script and in 1952 there were 21 centres doing this in East Pakistan with Central Education Ministry funding.³ This made the Bengalis to realize that their linguistic and cultural heritage would not get respect and their aspirations regarding a state, which would be an expression of their socio-economic independence, seemed to have been shattered. Without an avenue for political participation due to lack of representative politics or democracy, the future Bangladesh was founded which found expression in terms of linguistic nationalism.

Sheikh Mujib's period was marked by the euphoria relating to the emergence of independent Bangladesh. His period saw the establishment of cordiality and political necessities in delineating Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan. The history of separation, the compulsion of political realism made Mujib to overcome emotionalism in order to lay down the political foundation of bilateralism. Much has been written regarding the factors that led to the creation of Bangladesh, therefore, one need not go into the details here. After the creation of Bangladesh few factors impinged upon the foreign policy formulation of Bangladesh towards Pakistan. These are (i) the need for recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan (ii) the issue of prisoners of war (iii) division of assets and liabilities (iv) repatriation of Biharis. Only the first two issues have been resolved.

It is important to mention here that the first two issues defined the relationship between Bangladesh and Pakistan in initial years. After the separation of East Pakistan the immediate pressing issue was need for the recognition of Bangladesh, most importantly by Pakistan. People in Pakistan were not prepared to accept the existence of Bangladesh, therefore, its recognition was problematic initially. The recognition came with a resolution of National Assembly on 9 July 1973, which authorized Bhutto's government to recognise Bangladesh as an independent country. Bhutto never gave the recognition and delayed it

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to a more opportune time. However subsequently, the repatriation of PoWs was agreed through tripartite talks and the issue of only 195 PoWs charged with war crimes remained unsettled. Later with the intervention of Saudi Arabia and Libya, the problem was sorted out and Bangladesh was finally recognised on 22 February 1974 on the eve of second Islamic summit in Lahore. Recognising Bangladesh initially was difficult given the political context. However, to a large extent the responsibility for such a perception lies with the government of Pakistan, which, to camouflage its misdeed in former East Pakistan, portrayed the liberation movement as instigated and managed by India. The non-publication of Hamidoor Commission report (the report is partially published after parts of it were printed in the Indian media) also tried to protect the role of both the army and politicians in the break-up of Pakistan. Therefore, the issue of repatriation of PoWs got linked to the issue of recognition and was used as a bargaining tool.⁴ At the same time it is important to mention here that many of the Western countries and Islamic countries pressurized Bangladesh to adopt an attitude of clemency towards Pakistani army officers accused of war crimes.⁵

Most significant part was that Bangladesh clamoured for closer ties with the Islamic world not only due to religious reasons but also due to economic reasons. Moreover, after the break-up of Pakistan and assumption of power by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, he toured Muslim countries and dissuaded them to give formal recognition to Bangladesh. Significantly China and the US did not recognise Bangladesh immediately and the Chinese recognition came only with the Pakistani recognition. Bangladesh's economic imperatives compelled it to diversify its foreign policy. Initially the Islamic countries were reluctant to recognise Bangladesh and later with Bangladesh's admission to the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), things started looking up in terms of economic aid for Bangladesh. Moreover, the repatriation of PoWs who were kept in Indian camps also helped Bangladesh to strike an effective deal with Pakistan because Mujib harboured deep sense of suspicion towards Bhutto. Such an attitude was the result of his interaction with Bhutto before the 1971 war.

Bhutto had visited Bangladesh in June 1974 and was given a warm welcome and this was perhaps a manifestation of declining warmth towards India. Bhutto who was considering postponing his visit to Dhaka, changed his mind when he learnt about Indo-Bangladesh differences over Farraka.⁶ To quote an analyst who worked under Bhutto, “An element of regret in the common man at breaking away from Pakistan, combined with animosity against the growing domination of India, seemed to find an outlet in his visit. However, the past was not altogether forgotten.”⁷ Bangladesh-Pakistan relations did not move beyond a modicum of cordiality and both the leaders got enmeshed in the domestic problem to give much emphasis on the bilateralism.

Bhutto was the first leader to recognise the new regime in Bangladesh after the assassination of Mujib. However, he justified the need to recognise the new regime citing that such a recognition would help in preventing India’s intervention at a time when no government existed in the country.⁸ At the same time it is important to mention here that both Mujib and Bhutto did not share a good personal rapport and held each other responsible for what happened in 1971 before the emergence of Bangladesh. Bhutto hailed Mujib’s assassination as a “...victory for Pakistan, a vindication of the idea of one Pakistan. It was as if we had regained the ground lost in 1971.”⁹ Bangladesh-Pakistan relations have grown proportionately to the deterioration in Indo-Bangladesh relations. In the earlier years, Pakistan perceived Bangladesh as a client state of India and felt that its relations with Pakistan have been dictated by the concerns, which New Delhi had. But given the painful background of the separation of East Pakistan, Pakistan’s attitude was coloured with a sense of betrayal. Though the relationship remained fragile in the first few years after 1971 due to varied factors, the relations seemed to warm up only after General Zia took over.

Zia-ur-Rehman’s period saw gradual warming up of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. This can be attributed to the domestic political determinants and the deteriorating relations with India. India was also critical of military takeover in Bangladesh. Moreover, Bangladesh National Party (BNP) as a party has political constituency that are

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inherently anti-Indian. The institutional support to BNP came from the Army, *Jamaat-e-Islami*, the Muslim League and pro-Pakistani bureaucrats. “Since many of the Muslim League supporters collaborated with the Pakistani military during the Independence War, they found in the BNP a respectable forum for political rehabilitation.”¹⁰ The formation of Bangladesh National Party gave parties like *Jamaat-e-Islami* more respectability given the fact that this party not only aligned with the Pakistan army but was also an equal participant in the crimes that were perpetuated against those who were fighting for the creation of Bangladesh. Mujib banned most of these parties but later he adopted an attitude of clemency towards these elements in order to consolidate himself in politics.

Though India continued to be a factor in Bangladesh’s domestic politics, the political space created by deterioration of Indo-Bangladesh relations was filled in by Pakistan. Both the countries shared same views on various international issues. Anti-Indian sentiments were encashed by religious parties who played important role as a pressure group in cementing the bilateral ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan. In the initial years Pakistan was used as a counterbalance to India. Though both the countries share mistrust and suspicion regarding India’s intentions, they charted different foreign policy. Zia-ur-Rehman introduced two changes in the Bangladeshi constitution. A clause was added to Article 25 which stated that Bangladesh would consolidate and strengthen its relations with the Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity. Efforts were made to cement the traditional Islamic ties. The state that was established only on the basis of linguistic nationalism putting aside the religious affinity as secondary, moved towards religious symbolism as a result of political compulsions arising out of military takeover.

The problem in Bangladesh’s foreign policy is a divided polity represented by equally divided strong sentiments regarding the country’s relations with Pakistan and India. Though Zia-ur-Rehman visited Pakistan in 1977 and emphasized on mutual cooperation, he reportedly “expressed the need to free his country from its Indian

dependence.”¹¹ However, at the same time Pakistan could not become a substitute for Bangladesh’s relations with India. Despite the fact that Zia-ur-Rehman had the support of Pakistan when the Farraka issue was internationalised, he also realized that to resolve the problem Bangladesh needed to talk to India. Though the relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan were relatively better, absence of strong economic ties led the political factors to determine the bilateral ties. The issues remained unresolved and the involvement of both the military rulers in the domestic politics did not leave them with much time to ponder over the state of bilateral relations.

Whereas the problems related to the Farakka created divergence between India and Bangladesh, Pakistan sympathized with Bangladesh in its well known foreign policy plank against India. At the same time assumption of power by General Ershad and his Islamisation move gave a lot of assurances to Pakistan. Declaration of Bangladesh as an Islamic state strengthened Pakistan’s stand that the new country is not secular. Now Pakistan thought that it had retrieved its position vis-à-vis India in the context of two-nation theory. Though some of the analysts have emphasized that the military rulers in both Pakistan and Bangladesh themselves contributed to such in affinity, yet both faced the same problem of legitimacy. However, at the same time both the countries have their peculiar domestic problems and a domestic context to their bilateral relations.

After Bangladesh became formally an Islamic republic, the Islamic affinity between Bangladesh and Pakistan was emphasized. Being a military ruler, General Ershad saw the political parties as an anathema though he used Islamic symbolism in the domestic political context. Moreover, there were more convergences in the foreign policy of both the countries in the aftermath of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The issue of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis (Biharis) remained a major question. Especially in the context of hearty welcome that Pakistan accorded to the Afghan refugees whereas the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis remained a political thorn thus creating misgivings regarding Pakistan’s intention to take back its own people living in refugee camps.

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In the 1990s, Pakistan-Bangladesh relations remained cordial. Bangladesh took a position that it is not going to intervene in the Indo-Pak dispute though during Sheikh Hasina's period she offered her good office, to mediate between India and Pakistan. The issue of South Asia growth quadrangle in 1997 created a kind of wedge with Pakistan strongly opposing Bangladesh and Nepal proposal, but Pakistan's misgivings were later assuaged. The military coup in Pakistan in 1999 saw strong reaction from Sheikh Hasina's government in Bangladesh and later a meeting between the two heads of state got cancelled when Bangladesh criticized the military coup in Pakistan in the UN General Assembly meeting. Relations are back on track of being normal after General Musharraf's visit to Bangladesh in 2002. Though there is a host of issues that are included in the Memorandum of Understanding, the bilateral relations have not seen much breakthrough. Perhaps the issues that were listed in the MoU are neither significant nor path breaking. Some of the major issues that are complex but certainly would generate goodwill are discussed below.

CHALLENGES TO BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

The issue of repatriation of Biharis (stranded Pakistanis) has remained the most controversial issue in the Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. Pakistan is reluctant to take them back because their resettlement has been a problem in Sindh having deep political implications for the vulnerable ethnic relations between the Sindhis and the Mohajirs. The trilateral agreement between Bangladesh-Pakistan and India of 1974 on taking back the stranded Pakistanis, has not been implemented yet and the issue has bedeviled the Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. According to this agreement Pakistan had agreed to take those Bengalis who were earlier domiciled in former West Pakistan, were employees of the Central government, and their families who were members of divided families irrespective of their original domicile. However, out of 4,62,000 Biharis only 1,63, 000 were repatriated and rest of them are in the refugee camps. Earlier the first Nawaz Sharif government showed its willingness not only to repatriate the Biharis but also to settle them in Punjab and he in fact took back few Biharis in

January 1993, but later he cited logistic problems to receive more people. During January 1998 visit, Nawaz Sharif tried to resolve the issue by again promising to take back these stranded refugees. Accordingly the government promised to rehabilitate these stranded Pakistanis who numbered over 2,38,000 as per joint census carried out by both the Bangladesh government and Pakistan in 1992.

According to a study undertaken by the Dhaka University Refugee and Migratory Movement Unit, 59 per cent of those interviewed identified themselves as Bangladeshis, 35 per cent identified themselves as Pakistanis, 55 per cent were unwilling to go to Pakistan, 45 per cent wanted to go back and of these 30 per cent stated family reunion as the prime reason for their desire to go back to Pakistan.¹² An advertisement appeared in the *International Herald Tribune* appealing for donations to the Rabita Trust of Stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh, signed by Sartaj Aziz, Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs and Secretary of Pakistan Muslim League. This appeal stated, “the Government firmly renews its pledge to do all that it can to bring and rehabilitate these stranded Pakistanis numbering over 2,38,000...” Though Benazir had promised to take back these stranded Pakistanis and had built resettlement colonies but later abandoned the project because it would have affected PPP’s electoral prospects in Sindh and was apprehensive about the political implications given the volatile ethnic situation in Sindh as represented by the MQM. Later Nawaz Sharif also did not implement his promise made to Bangladesh regarding the repatriation.

The Delhi agreement of 1973 and the tripartite agreement of 1974 had seen some exchanges of Biharis with the Bengali speaking population in Pakistan. Though Zia government during his visit to Dhaka in 1985 agreed to take back the refugees and went to the extent of having an agreement with the Rabita Trust for repatriation, nothing concrete was done on the ground. Moreover, it is an extremely emotional question in Bangladesh for any government to deviate and take a stand. Some of the issues like division of assets and repatriation of Biharis have been thorny political issues. On 12 September 2003,

when the Pakistani Foreign Minister Kasuri visited Dhaka he met the leader of the Biharis, but there was not much progress on the issue. Kasuri admitted that the issue was both political and economic. As per reports, "In 1988, the Muslim World League formed a trust fund with the government of Pakistan to provide an airlift for these 'hostages of patriotism.' They raised a substantial sum, but after that it became hard to find any clue of that fund."¹³ Till 1974 some 160,000 Biharis were repatriated. The process slowed down after that. Between 1976 and 1982, some 19,000 people went to Pakistan. Under the Khaleda Zia government from 1991 to 1996, only 325 Biharis were repatriated.¹⁴ Since these refugees mostly constituted as Razakars and Al-Shams to help the Pakistan army during the liberation war and participated in the atrocities committed against the Muslims there is a strong resentment towards these people in Bangladesh. After the creation of Bangladesh these people wanted to go back to Pakistan because they knew that it would be difficult for them to be integrated given their background. Moreover, they felt that they were socio-culturally different from the Bengalis. Their participation along with the Pakistan army made them feel that they had a legitimate right to be repatriated. Though the Bangladesh government offered citizenship through Presidential Order-149 of 1972, only 6,00,000 Biharis accepted the offer, whereas the rest wanted to go back to Pakistan.

The issue of rendering apology for the excesses committed by the Pakistani army is very much alive in the memory of the public. General Musharraf's visit recently brought this emotional demand to the fore. Though Musharraf conveyed his 'regret' regarding 'the incidents of 1971,' that was looked upon by some as a clever move to avoid accepting the blame by the Pakistan army. To quote General Musharraf when he wrote in the visitor's book after paying homage to the war martyrs at Savar, "Your brothers and sisters in Pakistan share with you the pain of events of 1971. The excesses committed during that unfortunate period are regrettable". A significant section of Bangladesh population did not support close relations with Pakistan and asked the Pakistani government to tender an apology for the killings of 1971. The

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Dhaka government officially raised the issue of division of assets and the issue of stranded Pakistanis during General Musharraf's visit to Dhaka last year.

The issue of division of assets became more problematic due to the complex issues involved in it. Bangladesh laid claim to the central government physical assets that include buildings. The problem was compounded by the notional share of foreign aid and loans accruing to East Pakistan but appropriated by West Pakistan. Bangladesh also demanded compensation for the earlier period of transfer of resources from East to West Pakistan. Pakistan is of the view that revenue earnings from East Pakistan was much lower and it was the West Pakistan economy that had supported East Pakistan. According to Hassan Zaheer, during the period of 1970-71, the Central government receipts from East Pakistan were 23 per cent compared to the 77 per cent contribution made by West Pakistan.¹⁵ Assets worth 4.5 billion US dollars is what Bangladesh is demanding from Pakistan. According to a media report, at present Pakistan enjoys a 63 million dollars trade surplus with Bangladesh. It exports textiles, food and machinery worth \$95 million to Bangladesh, while importing goods worth \$32 million.¹⁶

PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH TRADE (1996-2001)

Years	Imports	Exports	Balance
1996-97	38.40	87.50	+49.10
1997-98	38.30	98.60	+60.3
1998-99	32.24	119.56	87.32
1999-00	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, Chambers of Commerce and industries, 2001), p.56, as cited in Moonis Ahmar, "The Challenge of Cooperation in Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations", *Regional Studies*, vol.XXI, no.1, Winter 2002-03, p.71

General Musharraf's visit resulted in the signing of a cultural agreement, signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for establishing Bangladesh-Pakistan Joint Business Council for promoting bilateral trade and a protocol for consultation on important issues by

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the foreign ministries of the two countries. The trade has been marginal, even though Pakistan has given to Bangladesh duty free access of jute and 20,000 tons of tea in its markets.¹⁷ Still, there is no direct cargo service between the ports of Karachi and Chittagong and the trade between the two countries is conducted via Singapore. Both the countries have around \$7.5 billion trade. However, balance of trade is in favour of Pakistan which exports around \$6 billion worth of items while imports from Bangladesh are pegged at \$1.5 billion. There is potential of joint ventures in textiles. According to reports, there are about 35 per cent of textile units in Pakistan which are sick. The owners could relocate these units in Bangladesh by entering into joint ventures with their counterparts there.¹⁸ Both the countries now agreed to have defence cooperation as well. Pakistan as a goodwill gesture waived off around Rs. 80 million which Bangladesh owed Pakistan relating to the purchase of defence equipment. According to a report, Pakistan has so far trained 900 military officers from Bangladesh and around 33 Pakistani officers have received training in Bangladesh. Besides, Bangladesh has requested for more slots in the military training program.¹⁹

Both the countries have also signed two agreements on cooperation. One of the protocols relating to bilateral consultations between the ministries of foreign affairs of the two countries, aims at further enhancing and strengthening friendly cooperative relations and to increase bilateral cooperation in mutually agreed fields. Under the protocol, the foreign secretaries of the two countries will hold regular consultations on an annual basis alternately in Dhaka and Islamabad.²⁰

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan, like any other countries is going to be determined by geography. The two countries do not share borders and socio-cultural similarities are also limited though both countries are Islamic states. Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan cannot be a substitute for its relations with India. Even bad relations with India cannot work towards the advantage of Pakistan given the distance.

Economic relations are of limited nature whereas Bangladesh's relations with India have greater economic potential. What is of concern to India is the increasing ISI activities in Bangladesh and their reported linkages with the North East insurgents. India has accused Bangladesh of helping the North-East insurgents.

At the same time it is pertinent to mention that Bangladesh-Pakistan relations are based on the common past and the fact that both countries once formed a single political union. However, the past linkages and certain degree of emotionalism about the two nations theory have not overridden the repression committed against the Bengalis during the liberation war. There are two forces working against each other which influences Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan. The groups, mostly Islamic parties which believe in the Islamic brotherhood and resent Bangladesh's relations with India and the other group that suffered at the hand of the army and was in the forefront of the freedom movement. Both these groups have domestic audience and, therefore, the relations have been tied to the domestic political context. Though the shackles of the past need to be broken, history plays an important role in the making of a nation. However, past can be assuaged with bold initiatives. The Pakistan military as well as the Government is not bold enough to tender an apology for the happenings of 1971 and the Bangladeshis who have suffered immensely at the hand of Pakistan army cannot let the issue to be closed. Given the geographical distance and limited interactions the gap in the relationship is difficult to be bridged, though it is not impossible.

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BOOK REVIEW

INSURGENCY IN INDIA'S NORTH-EAST: THE ROLE OF BANGLADESH

Edited by Dipankar Sengupta and Sudhir Kumar Singh

Authors Press, New Delhi, 2004.

Policy makers, the media as well as mainstream academia have long ignored India's north-east region. Thus, the book under review is a timely and honest effort to bring into focus this troubled region and its security implications for India. While the book deals primarily with separatism and security concerns, it does well to delve into the deeper social, economic and psychological roots of the troubled polity in North East India. One may argue that this volume mainly represents mainstream perceptions about the north-east, subaltern voices, that defy conventional wisdom, too find a place. Mention may be about of the contributions of Dilip Gogoi, Pahi Saikia, Manan Dwivedi and Dipankar Sengupta must make in this regard.

The excerpts from Prof. D. Gopal's keynote address presents a bird's eye-view of the problem of insurgency in the north-east and the role played by Bangladesh (and indeed, other neighbours like Myanmar and Bhutan) in the region. Prof. D. Gopal's critique of Nehruvian policy on the Naga question and the role played by Assamese politicians vis-à-vis the tribal people of Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram, is not only informative to those uninitiated to the political history of the region, but is also thought provoking.

K.K. Sinha brings out the perils of exclusion and insularity that plagues the north-east but his article lacks a framework through which at least some of these issues of insularity can be particularly tackled.

Dilip Gogoi writes knowledgeably on the issue of separatism in Assam. While highlighting the clichéd argument of the failure of the Central Government to address the economic and social aspirations of the Assamese people, he underlines the demographic threat, brought about by illegal Bangladeshi migration that has aggravated the problem. The duality of the Bangladeshi role in Assam, i.e., as a conduit of

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support for the separatists as well as the source of migration that negates the independent identity of Assam, is put forward convincingly by the author.

Pahi Saikia addresses the issue of migration of non-Assamese ethnic groups into Assam. It is an excellent piece of writing that puts the issue of illegal migration of Bengalis from Bangladesh in a historical perspective. The article represents a balanced view of the problem and appropriately elaborates on the socio-political tensions and the curse of vote bank politics in Assam caused by such illegal migration. Her suggestion of work permits for illegal migrants to prevent their becoming pawns of narrow electoral politics, is well made.

Manan Dwivedi's article on the Naga imbroglio should be credited for bringing to fore relatively unknown facets of the Naga movement. Not many Indians are aware that the Naga movement for independence goes back to 1929 and that it was an essentially non-violent civil society movement to start with. With the Indian state not engaging the non-violent actors in the Naga movement in the 1950s, the militant groups occupied the centre stage.

Dr. Dipankar Sengupta's paper analyses the causes of economic backwardness of the north-east. He contends that the combination of license-permit raj and import substitution industrialization policies are the real culprits for regional backwardness in the region. He also cites the absence of a strong industrial indigenous class as a determinant of under-development. Dr. Sengupta rightly argues that within the framework of the Indian democracy, subject to pressures from various lobbies, the north-east lost out to other regions in relative terms due to the lack of such a class of powerful industrial lobby Groups.

Dr. R.S. Saini does a comprehensive review of relevant constitutional and institutional provisions (UN and other bodies) to conceptualize insurgency and separatism in the North East. Saini's framework only justifies the policy of 'Hot Pursuit' of insurgents.

The three articles dealing with the role of Bangladesh as an actor in India's north-east provide a perspective on the rise of fundamentalism

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in Bangladesh. These highlight the compromises made by various institutional forces of the Bangladesh Government to pander to such fundamentalist sentiments and its repercussions on the north-east. There is an element of repetition in the three articles in this section. Of the three, the one by Dr. Krishna Gopal stands out for being comprehensive and touches upon various issues.

The last section explains the Pakistan dimension within the north-east region. Col. Anil Bhatt explores the nefarious role played by ISI in fanning the flames of insurgency in the region, with and without institutional support in Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan). His article provides a documentation of the ISI activities in the NE right from the help ISI provided Angami Phizo in 1956. Dr. Sudhir Singh emphasizes on the construction of basic infrastructure and promotion of tourism to tackle insurgency through empowerment of common masses. Dr. Savita Pande continues down the same path and conclusively shows how sovereign Bangladesh (post-1971) also served as a pawn in the hands of the ISI and its criminal designs against India. She deserves credit for analyzing the operational methodology of the ISI in north-east India.

Dr. Saswati Chanda and Gupta take the logic of Pande's argument even further and expose the role of Bangladesh as a willing partner of the ISI in its efforts to destabilize India. Those who argue restraint in India's dealings with Bangladesh would do well to read this article.

To sum it up, this book does justice to the topic it addresses. Policy makers and students would do well to go through its contents cover to cover.

Pritam Banerjee

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