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# Peace and Security Review

Volume 8 ■ Number 16 ■ First Quarter, 2017

## I N S I D E

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*Brigadier General Shafaat Ahmad, ndc, psc, (retd)*

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### **Bangladesh Myanmar Interplay Prosperity: Prospects & Challenges**

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### **Bilateral Relationship of Indonesia and Bangladesh in the Historical Perspective**

*M. Abdul Karim*



**Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies**  
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Original write-up between 6000 to 8000 words not published or submitted elsewhere, may be submitted to the Editor of the journal. The Chicago Manual of Style should be followed in the write-up placing notes either at the bottom of the page (footnotes) or at the end of the essay (endnotes). Table, map and diagrams should be placed in separate sheets.

Contributors are requested to enclose short biographical note and abstract of the article.

The views expressed in the articles published in the each quarters of the Journal not necessarily represent the views and policies of the Editorial Board or the Institute.

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## Editor's Note

The latest edition of 'Peace and Security Review' is released in a time when the world is witnessing conflicts on an epic proportion. Bangladesh found itself in a transnational quagmire as thousands of Rohingya came across the border from Myanmar. In these turbulent times, the ethno-conflict of the Myanmar has captured the attention of the world. Thousands of villages of Rohingya communities in Rakhine state were ravaged and the plight of the Rohingya multiplied several folds as ultra nationalist Buddhist movement gained momentum in Myanmar. Roughly little more than five thousand people crossed over the border into Bangladesh since late August alone to escape a military crackdown in Rakhine state. This unprecedented event of Rohingya refugee crisis has prompted an international outcry as the Bangladesh become destination for many ill-fated Rohingya refugees. The journal of this volume has a special focus on this deepening crisis. The majority of the articles in this volume focused on the various security implications of Rohingya influx in Bangladesh.

The first article is titled '**Foreign Policy of Myanmar**' by Brigadier General Shafaat Ahmad, ndc, psc, (ret'd) delves into the foreign policy of Myanmar. His erudite analysis has a two prong approach. He unveils how foreign policy of Myanmar influenced by its internal and external environments. As the author provides the background on the internal political turmoil, he points out that a lack of political cohesion that exists since its inception of the country. The internal environment of Myanmar had been very complex and gloomy from the time of independence. The lack cohesion also gave the rise of the ethno-religious tension that would plague throughout the history of the country. While explaining the external environment, he focused on the geographic location of Myanmar that would become a crucial point in the foreign policy in later years. The complexities of the peculiar geostrategic position of Myanmar, which lies between India, China, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, while formulating foreign policy of the country for years. Myanmar's foreign policy has undergone substantial change in its character and contents

during the last seven decades. The overarching objective of the foreign policy of Myanmar is focused on maintaining friendly relations with all countries. The neutrality was a high priority for the nation and had not shown any ideological inclination while building up relationships with its neighbors. The leaders of Myanmar opted for a policy of equidistant from the power blocks. The concept of peaceful co-existence, which had five principles, appealed them, and they joined China, India and others in endorsing the principles. The ruling military regime oriented their foreign policy with security in mind. The regime compromised on its isolationist foreign policy for the sake of economic necessity, as depending on the situation. Myanmar had developed discreet, but crucial, relationship with a few countries that were willing to provide economic assistance. The democracy ushered a new era in Myanmar as Aung san suu kyí's National League for Democracy (NLD) came to power with a sweeping majority. The new democratic government has been pursuing its foreign policy objectives with more firmness and deft as democratically elected leaders reached out to world leaders. Myanmar is gradually rebalancing its foreign relations. The country has to manage a delicate balance between domestic pressures while pursuing international opportunities with both regional and with foreign powers.

The second article is titled '**Understanding of Terrorism by the youth of Bangladesh**' by Md Sabbir Ahmed Jubaer. The author deals with one of the pressing issues of our time, the rise of terrorism in Bangladesh and the involvement of youth in the terror activities. In this paper, the author tries to find answers some of the key questions regarding youth perception of terrorism. The author delves into the theoretical aspects of the definition of terrorism. The articles also delve into the socio-cultural aspects of the terrorism that is influencing the youth in Bangladesh. The relationship between the religion and the terrorism, the influence of the international political upheaval and ways to combat terrorism were thoroughly discussed. The concept of terrorism is constructed over years with the socio-cultural context. As author cited numerous examples from world renowned researchers, it is clear that the fallout of the transnational politics would have a longstanding affect on the youth of Bangladesh when comes to forming an opinion on terrorism. Although the ideology is the key component in youth involvement in terror activities, there are other factors that are motivating the youth. Issues such as youth unemployment, a lack of freedom of expression are also derailing the youth development in the country, involving them into terror activities.

The third article is titled '**Bangladesh Myanmar Interplay Prosperity: Prospects & Challenges**' by Abu Mohammad Siddique Alam. In this article

the author's erudite analysis emphasized on the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar and how both countries can leverage this relationship towards mutual benefit. Bangladesh and Myanmar are two neighboring country have a historical connection and relationship. The both countries share common history and cultural values that brought these two states closer in the past. Myanmar was one of the few countries that first recognized Bangladesh as an independent state after the inception. In terms of foreign policy, national interest is the prime concern of any sovereign state when comes dealing with a friend or a foe. The author elaborated on the possibilities of building blocks that would ultimately pave the way of coherent development. As years gone by Bangladesh have realized there are more interests of building good economic and political relations with Myanmar that will pay the dividend in the long run. Although there are opportunities on the both end of the borders, however, there are some differences as well as challenges. Bangladesh has some disturbing issues like Rohingya refugee, illegal trade in border area and land boundary problems with Myanmar but Bangladesh reacted wisely in recent years. There were initiatives in the past to resolve some of the issues regarding political, security, cultural and economic issues that both the countries had experienced in the past. The geographical proximity and orientation of Bangladesh and Myanmar can usher an era of new development and progress. The enormous opportunities in terms of trade between two countries can contribute to regional economic interest as both South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) could benefit from initiative such as Special Economic Zone (SEZS). Bangladesh should take the initiative and play role in building a bridge between the SAARC and the ASEAN as Myanmar aligns itself with Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation BIMSTEC.

The forth article is titled '**Bilateral Relationship of Indonesia and Bangladesh in the Historical Perspective**' by M. Abdul Karim. This paper elaborates on the historic relationship between the Bangladesh and Indonesia that was built throughout the centuries. Since 1971 a harmonic relationship exists between the Bangladesh and Indonesia. Two countries also have a cultural relationship that dates back years. In the context of Indonesia, cultural development happened in stages; cultural development of Hinduism, development of Buddhism and development of Islam shares historical seminaries with Bangladesh. Trade between South and Southeast Asia also strengthen as scholarly research suggests that the Muslim traders embarked to the archipelago. Through trade Islam came to Indonesia mainly through harbors



of South Asian such as Shiraf, Guardar (Persian Gulf), Daibul (near to Karachi, Pakistan), Malabar, Koromondel (Chittagong, the harbor in Bangladesh). With similar cultural identities based on shared history, the two regions have indeed formed an intense bond, which truly reflects not only by trade relations which were formed over the years but also in the in the cultural, linguistic, religious similarities existing between the two regions. Bangladesh-Indonesia relation is likely to grow in coming years as the relationship was built on the shared values cultivated through years.

**Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd.)**  
Editor

## Foreign Policy of Myanmar

*Brigadier General Shafaat Ahmad, ndc, psc, (retd)<sup>1</sup>*

### Abstract

Myanmar occupies a strategic location bordering the two ascending powers, i.e. China and India, and facing the Indian Ocean. It is the only land transportation hub connecting East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. Its location—of geopolitical importance—makes it the focus of interest for the world's major powers, among them China, the United States, India, Japan, and the European Union. Myanmar's foreign policy has undergone substantial changes in its character and contents during the last seven decades. Although faced with severe challenges both at home and abroad, Myanmar has managed to pursue a successful foreign policy. It has contributed to state and regime security and opened up avenues for increasing economic cooperation. Myanmar has substantially benefitted from its relations with its two giant neighbours, i.e. China and India. The successive regimes in Myanmar had been very particular and effective in protecting its national interests. They had been playing their cards very carefully and shrewdly. Study of Myanmar's foreign policy is very interesting and thought-provoking. Foreign policy is made and implemented within an international and domestic political context, which must be understood by a state in order to determine the best policy option available. Foreign policy is formulated within an environment which is influenced by many factors. In this paper significant aspects of Myanmar's foreign policy have been discussed. These include: the external and internal environments under which the foreign policy is formulated, a brief resume of the foreign policy followed in the last seven decades and a look into the future of Myanmar's foreign policy.

### Introduction

Myanmar, previously known as Burma has been described as “an insane, beautiful, challenging, and hilarious country” by Will Hatton, a backpack

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traveler.<sup>2</sup> It has abundance of natural resources, which include petroleum, timber, tin, antimony, zinc, copper, tungsten, lead, coal, some marble, limestone, precious stones, natural gas, and hydropower. Myanmar has the largest jade and ruby mines in the world and they are of the some of the best in quality also. There are also sapphires and diamonds. It also has one of the best quality timbers in the world. It is home to one of the world's oldest petroleum industries, with its crude oil exports dates back to 1853.<sup>3</sup>

Myanmar occupies a strategic location bordering the two ascending powers, i.e. China and India, and facing the Indian Ocean. It is the only land transportation hub connecting East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. Its location—of geopolitical importance—makes it the focus of interest for the world's major powers, among them China, the United States, India, Japan, and the European Union.<sup>4</sup> *In Samuel Huntington's terms, it lies across the fault lines between three major civilizations, those of the Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians. Also, at critical times, Burma has been a cockpit for rivalry between the superpowers and, in the fluid strategic environment of the early 21st century, its important position is once again attracting attention from analysts and officials.*<sup>5</sup>

## Myanmar's Foreign Policy Environment

### External Environment

Myanmar inherited a geographic location that presented some formidable strategic challenges. The country's leaders understood that they have to reckon with the complexities of the peculiar geostrategic position between India, China, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean while formulating their foreign policy. This fact was highlighted by Prime Minister U Nu when he said in the Parliament in 1950, *"Take a glance at our geographical position – Thailand in the east, China in the north, and India in the west, and stretching southward, Malay, Singapore and so on. We are hemmed in like a tender gourd among the cactus."*<sup>6</sup> The

2 Hatton, Will, "10 Reasons You Need to go to Myanmar" <https://www.yahoo.com/travel/10-reasons-you-need-to-travel-to-myanmar-.> browsed 26 May 2015

3 Dr. Hla Maung, Ambassador (Rtd), *"Recent Economic Development of Myanmar"*, April, 2016

4 Yonghong, Dai and Liu Hongchao, "Rivalry and Cooperation: A New "Great Game" in Myanmar," *Asia Paper*, December 2014, Institute for Security and Development Policy, Västra Finnbodavägen 2, 131 30 Stockholm-Nacka, Sweden, [www.isdp.se](http://www.isdp.se), p-5.

5 Andrew Selth, *"Burma: A Strategic Perspective,"* Working Paper #13, Strategic and Defense Studies Center, Australian National University, May 2001, p.-5.

6 U Nu, speech delivered in Parliament, 5 September 1950, in "U Nu, From peace to stability: selected speeches" . (Rangoon: Government of Burma, 1951), pp. 95–105, Quoted in Andrew Selth, *"Burma and the Threat of Invasion: Regime Fantasy or Strategic Reality,"* Regional Outlook – 17, Griffith University, Griffith Asia Institute,

geographic borders have contributed to its very peculiar strategic perceptions allowing Myanmar to develop its own uniqueness.

Historically, Burma's relations with China and Thailand had been critical. Starting from 13<sup>th</sup> century there had been Chinese incursions into Burma; lately the Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang, KMT) entered northern Burma to escape from the Communists. Similarly there had been rivalry between Burma and Thailand, which resulted in number of wars between them in the past.<sup>7</sup> The US support for the Kuomintang troops in the 1950s,<sup>8</sup> Chinese support for the Burmese Communist Party till late 1980s<sup>9</sup> and Thailand's support to the ethnic minority refugees<sup>10</sup> have exacerbated the fear of foreign intervention into Burma. These have made a very deep imprint on the minds of the Burmese leaders and elites and created a sense of general fear and indifferent psychosis towards outside world.

When Southeast Asian region became a hotspot of the global power politics during the Cold War period, many countries of the region joined one of the blocks. But Burma looked inward and opted for nonalignment and isolationism.<sup>11</sup> By 1961 the Kuomintang were driven out of Burma.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 1980s there was radical change in Burma's external environment as China withdrew support for the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). The imposition of sanctions by the western countries in the aftermath of the brutal handling of the 1988 uprising and non-compliance of the 1990 election results made Myanmar's external relations extremely challenging.<sup>13</sup> During the 1990s and subsequently China's move towards economic cooperation with the Southeast Asian countries, ASEAN and Indian's getting closer to Myanmar improved the immediate habitat. Since the lifting of most of the sanctions by the western countries has improved the external environment of Myanmar, which will have positive impact upon the foreign policy formulation. However, the latest exodus of the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar due to military action may bring in new difficulties for the country.

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7 Steinberg, David I, *"Burma/Myanmar: What everyone needs to Know"*, (2013), p-21-22

8 Egretau and Jagan, *Ibid*, pp-62

9 Smith, Martin, *"Burma: Insurgency and the politics of Ethnicity"*, (1999), p-381

10 Egretau and Jagan, *ibid*, p-62

11 Rin-Sup Shinn, "Government and Politics" in Bunge, Frederica M,(ed), *"Burma: A country study"*, (1983), p-209

12 New York Times, *"In Remote Thai Villages, Legacy of China's Lost Army Endures"*, by Amy Qin. 14 January, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/15/world/asia/in-remote-thailand-the-lost-soldiers-of-the-kuomintang.html>

13 Jürgen Haacke (2006) *"The political-security imperative and foreign policy goals"*, The Adelphi Papers, p-17

## Internal Environment

Burma's internal environment had been very complex and gloomy from the time of independence. The birth of the newly independent state became the prelude to the outbreak of a series of rebellions. For variety of reasons a number of dissident groups did not accept the government of U Nu. The overall socio-political situation of Burma was very critical. There were numerous dissident groups, a major part of these groups were politically motivated, while there were others who indulged in criminal and anti-social activities.<sup>14</sup> Aung San's assassination just months before Burma got independence took away the leader who could successfully assure all potential dissident groups that they would get their due share in the new state. The dissident groups had apprehensions about their future in a Burmese-centered state.<sup>15</sup> Initially the separatist groups had tendencies toward an independent 'ethnic nation' with its distinctive 'identity', however, with the passage of time this changed to autonomy within a federal structure. The 1962 military takeover brought in major shifts in the socio-political system of Burma. It offered innovative and radical modes of political governance and socioeconomic revolutionary ideas, along with an "isolationist" diplomatic approach.<sup>16</sup> A doctrinaire system was introduced to prevent external involvement in economic, social or cultural activities within Burma. A "Burman" inspired cultural protectionism along with Buddhism was imposed and promoted by mixing 'Burman' pride with "xenophobia".<sup>17</sup>

1988 was a watershed year for Burma. General Ne Win stepped down from power after 26 years, a new iconic figure, Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of General Aung San emerged in the political forefront of Burma, the "8888" uprising took place and the military staged another coup to re-establish their authority. The generals who took over the powers, although, they were the protégée of Ne Win yet, had different perceptions about the overall socio-political situation of the country. Their vision and mission were the same, i.e. to continue to have stranglehold over the country and consolidation of the military's power.<sup>18</sup> The regime took measures to neutralise the ethnic armed resistance, and took some drastic measures to improve the economy.<sup>19</sup> The military very deftly maneuvered itself through the period from early 1990s to

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14 Cady, John F, "A History of Modern Burma", (1958), p- 578

15 Fearon, James D and David D. Laitin, "Random Narratives, Burma", p- 10-11, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/BCES-AP-01-dynamics\(en\).pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/BCES-AP-01-dynamics(en).pdf),

16 Egretau and Jagan, Ibid, pp-113

17 Egretau and Jagan, Ibid, p-116

18 Ibid, p- 140

19 Fink, Christina, "Living in Silence in Burma: Surviving under Military Rule", (2009), p-70

2010. It controlled the internal democratic movement and parried all external pressures while continuing with its “roadmap to disciplined democracy.” A new constitution was drafted and approved in a nationwide referendum in May 2008. The constitution has been very skillfully prepared to ensure the military’s dominance over the affairs of state. An election was held in 2010 under the new constitution, which brought in retired generals in the garb of civilian into the administration. A former four-star general and a member of the former ruling military junta became the president and embarked on a series of political reforms that have liberalized the repressive regime. The new government strengthened civilian institutions and opened political spaces: political prisoners were released, control over media and Internet were relaxed and opposition political parties were allowed to register for and participate in the by-elections in April 2012.<sup>20</sup> This has been followed by another general election in November 2015 which has brought the opposition (National League for Democracy) NLD into power. The military has not taken a backseat role either; it has actively shaped and defined the whole reformist policies. It has been actively participating “in the national leadership role of the state,” as laid down in the Constitution.<sup>21</sup> The new government has been able to convince the international community about its sincerity about transition to “disciplined democracy.” At the same time the internal environment has become more conducive to open socio-political activities. However, the Rohingya crisis has the omen to erase whatever goodwill the Suu Kyi government has earned.

## Foreign Policy making In Myanmar

Myanmar’s foreign policy has undergone substantial change in its character and contents during the last seven decades. The overarching objective of the foreign policy of Myanmar is to maintain friendly relations with all countries. This admirable objective also reflects the hard truth of having to take geopolitical realities into account.<sup>22</sup> Myanmar’s entry into the comity of nations at a time when Cold War became intense had a profound impact in defining its policy priorities. It’s foreign policy has been dictated by a combination of factors: nation’s territorial integrity and internal security, political solidarity of the state, distrust of foreign powers and economic development.<sup>23</sup> Its leaders showed no inclinations for any ideological swing, they opted for a policy of

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20 Bunte, Marco, “Burma’s Transition to Quasi-Military Rule: From Rulers to Guardians?”, “Armed Forces & Society”, (2013)

21 Ibid

22 Thuzar, Moe, “Myanmar and ASEAN: New Beginnings, New Directions?” (2016), Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies,

23 Bunge, ibid, p-207-208

equidistant from the power blocks. The concept of peaceful co-existence, which had five principles, appealed them, and they joined China, India and others in endorsing the principles.<sup>24</sup> Myanmar adopted a neutralist foreign policy, joined NAM and pursued this policy till 1989. In 1990, Myanmar's foreign policy started deviation from its traditional course due to internal constraints and external isolation. It developed an overly dependence on China. Again in 2011, due to internal constraints and external environment made some move to reduce this dependency.<sup>25</sup> In 2016 the new democratic government is trying to work out a new equation with China.

The foreign policy making in Myanmar have been heavily influenced by security oriented personnel. Decision making in foreign policy have been closely linked with security policy. Personality cult has also impacted upon foreign policy making. Historically, individual leadership style, worldview and personal experience of the top leaders of Myanmar has shaped the foreign policy behaviour and patterns of its foreign relations.<sup>26</sup> Fear of disintegration of the Union or terming Myanmar as "Yugoslavia" of Asia has haunted the military, which had been in the charge of framing foreign policy for Myanmar since 1962. After the political transition in 2011, two extremist Buddhist outfits — the Mabatha and the "969" Movement — have dominated Burmese political thought and ideology. Firebrand radical Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu has emerged as the de facto proponent of communal discord. Both the "969" Movement and the Mabatha seem to have one common goal: creation of an exclusively Buddhist state in Myanmar.<sup>27</sup> This has influenced the government's attitude towards the ethnic minorities, particularly the Muslims.

The foreign policy of Myanmar since its independence has been shaped by two major factors:

- a. The geo-strategic stakes surrounding a country that is uncomfortably located at the crossroads of global and regional powers security interests, and
- b. Post-independence domestic politics characterized by a failed nation-building process and the dominance of the military in the national policy making process.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p-209.

<sup>25</sup> Yun Sun, "China and Myanmar: Moving Beyond Mutual Dependence", in David Steinberg (ed), "Myanmar: The Dynamics of an Evolving Polity", (2015), p-285 :

<sup>26</sup> Moye, Maung Aung, (2016), "Myanmar's Foreign Policy under the USDP Government: Continuities and Changes", Journal of Current Southeast Asian Studies, 35,1,123 – 150.

<sup>27</sup> Sufyan bin Uzayr, "Buddhism and Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar", August 19, 2014, Foreign Policy In Focus, <http://fpif.org/buddhism-ethnic-cleansing-myanmar/>

<sup>28</sup> Egretau and Jagan, ibid, p-71



## Resume on Myanmar's Foreign Policy

Myanmar's foreign policy of the last seven decades can be divided into four periods: (1) period of neutrality and non-alignment under parliamentary democracy, (2) period of isolationism under Ne Win (3) period of opportunistic engagement from 1988 to 2011, and (4) period of reintegration with the international community from 2011 onward. A survey of the foreign policies adopted by different regimes indicate that during the first two periods Burma's foreign relations had been dictated by national and internal security and a distrust of foreign powers, which resulted in isolationism.<sup>29</sup> In the third period, in addition to the above two factors diversification and modernization of economy by developing relationship with selected countries was adopted. In the fourth period in addition to the above three factors, another factor has been added, i.e. opening up of to the outside world.

The first decade after independence was a period of vibrant diplomacy, taking active part in international arena. From 1962 Burma/Myanmar has relied quite heavily on bilateralism and did not pay much attention to multilateralism up to 2011. From 2011, Myanmar pursued its foreign policy through multilateralism in tandem with bilateralism. From 1960s to late 1980s Burma's foreign policy focused on bilateralism. With the change of guard in 1988, there were some changes on the diplomatic front also.<sup>30</sup>

## Period of neutrality and non-alignment under parliamentary democracy

Myanmar's paramount leader Aung San wrote in 1946 that, "*someday it may prove necessary and possible for us to have, say, something like a United States of Indo-China comprising French Indo-China, Thailand, Malaya, Indonesia and our country. It is not an idealistic conception. It is one that may well be commended by historical developments of these countries having several points of affinity with one another ethnically, strategically, economically and otherwise.....By cooperating with other nations for multi-lateral interests we can have benefit of the world's best in every possible way and thus our life will become infinitely higher and richer.*"<sup>31</sup> This is farsightedness! Today's ASEAN is than is the dream of Aung San. Aung San believed in multi-lateralism, he argued that Burma could not stand alone in a dangerous international environment.

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29 Bunge, Frederica M, "*Burma: a country study*" (1983), p-207-208;

30 Ibid

31 Silverstein, Josef, "*The Political Legacy of Aung San*" (ed), Cornell, University, New York, (1993), p- 103



His successor U Nu also had the same perception when he repeatedly mentioned that Burma was *"hemmed in like a tender gourd among the cactuses."*<sup>32</sup> Burma was the first non-communist country to recognize Peoples Republic of China on 19 December 1949.<sup>33</sup> This was a big diplomatic step by Burma which showed that it was attaching great importance to its giant northern neighbour. It also indicated Burma's desire to maintain friendly and cordial relations with both the power blocks. U Nu developed a policy of neutrality through which Burma would be, as far as was possible, on good terms with all countries and would avoid entangling in alliances. He distanced himself from Cold War confrontations, saying *"we cannot allow ourselves to be absorbed into any power bloc."*<sup>34</sup> U Nu throughout his tenure during 1950's followed an independent, neutral and non-aligned foreign policy. Burma showed its resolve to maintain neutrality. Its actions during Korean crisis, Soviet invasion of Hungary, the Suez crisis and the Cuba crisis proved it. U Nu's diplomatic skills earned him a respect in the world capitals. He befriended Indian and Chinese prime ministers through his personal link and this was reflected in their signing of the *"Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence."*<sup>35</sup> Burma took active part in the Bandung Conference in 1955 and the first NAM Summit in Belgrade in 1961<sup>36</sup> Myanmar's U Thant was appointed, first, as the acting Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1961, and, later, twice elected to the position. He led the world body for the next ten years.

32 U Nu, quoted in Steinberg, David, *"Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know"*, p-4

33 Bunge, Frederica M, ibis, p-208;

34 *"Neutralist Foreign Policy"*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/myanmar/government-1948-62-4.htm>

35 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peoples Republic of China, *"China's Initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence,"* [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/t18053.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18053.shtml). The five principles are: (1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty (changed to mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity at the Asian-African Conference), (2) mutual non-aggression, (3) non-interference in each other's internal affairs, (4) equality and mutual benefit and (5) peaceful co-existence.

36 Bandung Conference: In April, 1955, representatives from twenty-nine governments of Asian and African nations gathered in Bandung, Indonesia to discuss peace and the role of the Third World in the Cold War, economic development, and decolonization. Source: Office of the Historian, Department of State, USA, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/bandung-conf>

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): The first Conference of Non-Aligned Heads of State, at which 25 countries were represented, was convened at Belgrade in September 1961, largely through the initiative of Yugoslavian President Tito. The membership of the Non-Aligned Movement currently stands at 120 countries and 17 Observer States. The focus has now shifted away from essentially political issues, to the advocacy of solutions to global economic and other problems. Source: <http://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/non-aligned-movement-nam/>

## Period of isolationism under Ne Win

The military takeover in March 1962 was a turning point in Burma's history. Initially the military government under General Ne Win continued with the foreign policy of U Nu. But slowly and gradually it started to distance itself from international politics. The military regime exhibited a deep-seated antagonism towards the west and contact with the outside world was kept to an absolute minimum. While 1950s had been a tremendous era for Burma's international prestige, in the next three decades it slowly withdrew from frontline international politics and shunned most of the diplomatic connections.<sup>37</sup> Ne Win introduced an ideology called the 'Burmese Way to Socialism', mixed with a strong xenophobia and nationalistic policy. By mid-1960s Burmese government had stopped using the term "*non-alignment*" and instead started to use the term "*independent foreign policy*."<sup>38</sup> It avoided any strategic involvement in "hot" issues, like, the Indo-China conflict, the Vietnam crisis, that were the focus of 1960s international political scenario. Ne Win skillfully refused to take any positions and opted for "very quiet" and assertive neutrality. So much was the neutrality that the Time magazine in its editorial on 16 September 1966 described Burma as "200% neutral."<sup>39</sup>

The military government initiated a "Burman" inspired cultural protectionism, which was a blend of "Burman" pride and xenophobia, to safeguard the dominant "Burman" identity with Buddhist heritage. To eliminate sources of Western influence, foreign agencies, such as the Asia Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the British Council, and the library of the United States Information Agency, were shut down. Western missionaries were expelled and visits by foreign tourists and scholars were restricted.<sup>40</sup> Similarly a nationalisation programme was launched which affected the Indians, Chinese, Anglo-Burmese and Western trade and banking communities. As a result most of them were forced to flee the country. The purpose was to put the private foreign owned enterprises in the hands of the local "Bamar" people. As Egretau and Jagan termed, a "Bamboo Curtain" came down on Burma.<sup>41</sup> Burma continued to refuse to align itself with either of the superpowers and kept aloof from regional associations, such as the Association of Southeast

37 Egretau, Renaud & Larry Jagan, *"Soldiers and Diplomacy: Understanding the Foreign Relations of the Burmese Praetorian State,"* (2013), p- 114-115

38 Myoe, Maung Aung, (2016), *"Myanmar's Foreign Policy under USDP Government: Continuities and Changes"* in Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 35,1, 129 - 130

39 *"Burma: The 200% Neutral,"* Time September 16, 1966

40 *"Ne Win Military Rule - Neutralism and Seclusion"*, Global Security, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/myanmar/ne-win-4.htm>, browsed on 12 August 2017

41 Egretau, Renaud & Larry Jagan, *ibid*, p-110

Asian States (ASEAN), which was formed in 1967. Neutralism, however, was combined with a new element, a “policy of seclusion”. Being a founder member, Burma left the NAM, citing the reason that the organization had deviated from its original neutralist stances. With NAM links severed Burma continued to showcase its “active and independent” foreign policy, but in reality it retreated further into cocoon.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the “go-it-alone” policy, Burma opted for selected tactical overtures toward any country that could possibly help it to sustain its economy. From late 1970s the regime started taking foreign assistance from the western countries and Japan compromising on the autarkical ideology.<sup>43</sup> The regime compromised on its isolationist foreign policy for the sake of economic necessity, whenever needed. Myanmar had developed discreet, but crucial, relationship with a few countries that were willing to provide economic assistance. The two-and-half decade long isolationist perceptions got entrenched into the mindset of the later generation of military officers.<sup>44</sup> This limited opening to the outside world could not prevent the 1988 socio-political uprising, which led to the military to stage a second coup.

### **Period of opportunistic engagement from 1988 to 2011**

In September 1988 a new generation of generals staged a “coup by consent” as has been termed by Professor Steinberg.<sup>45</sup> The geopolitical environment of 1988 was markedly different from 1962. Similarly the internal environment was also different. The popular uprising was almost successful when some elements of the military joined in the demonstration. Although the failed people’s movement was prompted by internal economic crisis, but the context of the times in East Asia perhaps puts it in comparative perspective. In 1986, Philippines president was forced to flee the country because of “people’s power”, this was followed by ouster of South Korean President in 1987.<sup>46</sup> Then came the 1988 uprising in Burma and it was followed by another failed attempt at Tiananmen Square in Beijing. None of the events were correlated yet they indicated that times were changing.

The military was very brutal in suppressing the uprising. Coincidentally, on 12 September, 1988, a US fleet of five ships, including the aircraft carrier USS

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42 Thuzar, Moe, “*Myanmar and ASEAN: New Beginnings, New Directions?*” (2016), Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies,

43 Egretreau, Renaud & Larry Jagan, *ibid*, p-134

44 *Ibid*, p-139

45 *Ibid*, p-82

46 Steinberg, David, *ibid*, p-80-81

“Coral Sea” appeared off the Burmese coast. The rationale for their presence was said to be the evacuation of the US personnel from Burma, but it gave fuel to the xenophobic fervor of the Burmese junta. The “1988 uprising” suddenly exposed Burma to the outside world. Robert Taylor termed 1988 as genuine geopolitical watershed for both Burma and its military leadership.<sup>47</sup> The military regime was confronted with a new evolving post-Cold War geopolitics and an increasing globalization. It decided to “break out of isolation,” albeit at its own terms and it succeeded partially. Initially China came with staunch and open support and later Japan also joined in giving lavish economic assistance. India, who initially voiced discontentment over the military takeover started to engage with the junta. It joined ASEAN in 1997. This policy approach helped the junta to counter the sanctions imposed by the western countries.<sup>48</sup>

Giving highest priority to its national interest of safeguarding “national integrity and sovereignty”, the regime moved to cement its relations with China, which was its major supplier of military hardware, infrastructure construction and development assistance. At the same time it also improved its relations with India, who also supplied some military equipment. In the meantime, Thailand extended a hand of “constructive engagement,” which brought Thai businesses in the country. During this period Myanmar joined a number of regional groupings: rejoined NAM in 1992, Greater Mekong Sub-Region Economic Cooperation Organisation (GMS-EC) in 1992, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in 1997, Irrawaddy, Chao Praya, Mekong Economic Strategic Group (ACMEC) in 2003. It also attended the “Kunming Initiative”, which included Bangladesh, China and India.<sup>49</sup> Myanmar’s joining ASEAN in 1997 had greatly enhanced the credibility of the military government. All these indicate the regime was willing to integrate with the world community, but at the same time preferred no foreign attention and involvement in its internal affairs.

While the Myanmar’s neighbouring countries adopted a policy of constructive engagement, the western countries imposed sanctions in view of the brutal crackdown and suppression of the 1988 movement by the military junta and the non-implementation of the results of the 1990 election. There was a dramatic geopolitical consequence of this situation, as the western countries opted out of Myanmar, it swiftly slid into China’s “strategic zone of influence.”<sup>50</sup> The

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47 Robert Taylor, “*The State in Myanmar*”, (2009), p- 375, quoted in Egretau and Larry, *ibid*, p-142

48 Egretau, Renaud & Larry Jagan, *ibid*, p-143

49 Steinberg, David, *ibid*, p-96

50 Egretau, Renaud & Larry Jagan, *ibid*, p-144

first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been very fruitful for Myanmar. During this period it has been successful in forging effective partnership with some of the Asian countries. Apart from China, India, Thailand, Singapore, the regime very tactfully developed a network of cordial relations with Russia, few East European countries, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Iran. Thus in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century Myanmar was no more an isolationist and reclusive as it was portrayed by the western media.<sup>51</sup>

#### Period of Reintegration with the International Community from 2011

The 2010 election gave a new type of governance to Myanmar and a new appearance to the state. Although, the government was composed of mostly retired military officers but they presented a complete different façade. The newly elected president retired General Thein Sein in his inaugural speech highlighted that they will continue with the foreign policy adopted by the previous military regime. He emphasized that Myanmar *will stand firm as a respected member of the global community, will take on the challenges of the twenty-first century in a bold and resolute manner*.<sup>52</sup> In January 2015 he further reiterated that *"we have continued carrying out our duties of becoming a respectable, dutiful and responsible country of the family of nations by breaking out from international sanctions and isolation*".<sup>53</sup> The government was very eager to project an image of reformist and that it is different from the previous regimes.

The new administration was keen to open up with the west. Writing in "the Diplomat" Aung Tun termed the government's foreign policy as "Look West", something similar to India's policy of "Look East" or the US policy of "Pivot towards Asia". This policy was designed to build a sound relationship with the West to balance China's excessive influence in Myanmar; and also develop better ties with other Asian countries.<sup>54</sup> Naypyidaw's this policy has been quite successful. The European Union lifted all sanctions on Myanmar, except for an arms embargo, despite a Human Rights Watch report which accused authorities of complicity in the mass killing of Muslims in the Rakhaine State.<sup>55</sup>

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51 Ibid, p-234-235

52 U Thein Sein, President of Myanmar, excerpts from his inaugural speech and address to the UN General Assembly, quoted in Myoe, Maung Aung, (2016), *"Myanmar's Foreign Policy under USDP Government: Continuities and Changes"* in Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 35,1, 129 - 130

53 Ibid

54 Aung Tun, *"Myanmar's "Look West" Policy: Is China Being Sidelined?"* "The Diplomat", 26 June 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/06/myanmars-look-west-policy-is-china-being-sidelined/>

55 Reuters, April 23, 2013, *"Obama announces lifting of U.S. sanctions on Myanmar"*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-eu-idUSBRE93L11G20130422>

The regime also released Aung San Suu Kyi, after 15 years of house arrest and allowed her back into politics. The government secured an agreement from the other ASEAN members to resume the deferred rotational chairmanship of the organisation in 2014.<sup>56</sup> During the its chairmanship, Myanmar hosted a number of meetings of the heads of state/government and number of ministerial level meetings, these boosted the image of the government. Myanmar's also organized the Southeast Asian Games in 2013.

As Myanmar showed interest to open up, so the international community was also willing to help. Thus there was a congenial environment to work for mutual benefit. A succession of foreign leaders, including U.S. President Barack Obama, travelled to Myanmar, and the country started attracting a surge of interest from overseas businesses keen to enter one of Asia's last untapped markets. The focus of the government was on reintegrating with the international community, which it had done remarkably well.

A new civilian government came to power after November 2015 elections. Aung San Suu Kyi, assumed the newly created post of the State Councilor, a position similar to Prime Minister, on 6 April 2016, in addition to the post of foreign minister.<sup>57</sup> After taking over the foreign ministry portfolio, Daw Suu Kyi pledged that the government would adopt a people-centered policy, emphasizing the relations between peoples of different countries, creating friendly and cooperative relations between them.<sup>58</sup> This was a departure from the previous regimes policy, where people to people contact was kept a minimum. The Ministry of Information's write-up further elaborates, *"it is essential to pursue people-to-people contacts to improve the understanding of the actual situation in Myanmar and the country's external and internal policies. After many years of isolation of Myanmar from the world – and of the world from Myanmar – the country needs more visits, exchanges and interactions with leaders, scholars, students, civil society organizations and not least tourists from other countries. Careful attention should be given to practical arrangements, including an effective immigration policy for foreign scholars."*<sup>59</sup>

The new democratic government has been pursuing its foreign policy objectives with more firmness and deft. Daw Suu Kyi visited Beijing and ASEAN capitals,

56 Thuzar, Moe, *ibid*, p-5

57 ABC News, 05 April 2016, *"Aung San Suu Kyi to become 'State Counsellor' of Myanmar"* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-05/aung-san-suu-kyi-to-become-state-counsellor/7301994>, browsed 15 June 2017

58 *"Myanmar's post-election foreign policy"* Ministry of Information, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, <http://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/?q=content/myanmar%E2%80%99s-post-election-foreign-policy>

59 *Ibid*



and in September she visited the USA. These visits indicated her priorities as well her eagerness to develop a personal rapport with the world leaders.<sup>60</sup> She convinced the Obama administration to lift sanctions. Accordingly the USA lifted most of the sanctions in October 2016.<sup>61</sup> Her diplomacy also worked when China, backed by Russia, blocked a U.N. Security Council statement on Myanmar after the 15-member body met to discuss the situation in Rakhine state, where the country's military is conducting a security operation against the Muslim Rohingyas.<sup>62</sup>

## A Look at the Future

Myanmar's reform and opening has begun to improve conditions for its people, who were long denied the benefits of international trade and exchange. The present flurry of diplomacy is encouraging, but human rights and economic development in Myanmar still have a long way to go. Naypyidaw is not pivoting away from Beijing; it is rebalancing its foreign relations to manage domestic pressures and pursue international opportunities.<sup>63</sup> At present Rohingya crisis has almost quashed all that the present government has achieved. It indicates the fragility of the civilian government.

Myanmar's new government's foreign policy will continue to be in line with the fundamental principles which have been followed from the time of independence, with special emphasis on domestic matters of relevance to foreign policy. If Myanmar wants to be active and inclusive in the international arena then the present government will have to deal with a series of tricky domestic balancing acts, these include: resolution of the demands of the ethnic minorities, including the Rohingyas; to tame the military in its violation of human rights particularly in the ethnic minority areas; balancing environmental degradation vi-à-vis economic development and be transparent to the international community.

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60 Jonathan T. Chow and dynamics. d Leif-Eric Easley, "Myanmar's Foreign Policy Rebalance" The Diplomat, 10 September, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/myanmars-foreign-policy-rebalance/>, 24/4/17

61 Reuters, October 8, 2016 "Obama announces lifting of U.S. sanctions on Myanmar", <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-myanmar-sanctions-idUSKCN127262>

62 Reuters, March 18, 2017, "China, Russia block U.N. council concern about Myanmar violence" <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-un-idUSKBN16O2J6>

63 Jonathan T. Chow and Leif-Eric Easley, "Myanmar's Foreign Policy Rebalance", The Diplomat, September 10, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/myanmars-foreign-policy-rebalance/>

## Conclusions

In the past seven decades Myanmar's politics has undergone metamorphic changes. Right from independence the Myanmar politicians promoted a high profile diplomacy seeking prestige among the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa. It joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and adopted a neutral foreign policy keeping aloof from the Cold War rivalry. Myanmar's raging civil war spread across its national borders, which affected its neighbours, China, Thailand, India, and Pakistan (East Pakistan, present day Bangladesh).<sup>64</sup> As a result it developed an apprehensive neighbourhood policy. The military, which seized power, found that neutralism and non-alignment were neither sufficient to curb the impact of geopolitics and bi-polar world politics, nor effective in addressing the country's domestic security threats as such they opted for an isolationist withdrawal. The xenophobic experience after 1962 reoriented Myanmar's foreign policy with very few diplomatic doors open. This reoriented foreign policy had a deep impact on Myanmar's contemporary settings. This has strongly shaped the views and perceptions of the rulers till today.<sup>65</sup>

Burma's perception of its foreign policy has been strongly influenced by the fact that Burma shares border with China, India and Thailand. Its relations with China and Thailand had been critical. Repeated Chinese incursions into Burma including the Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang, KMT); rivalry between Burma and Thailand resulting in number of wars between them;<sup>66</sup> the US support for the Kuomintang troops in the 1950s,<sup>67</sup> Chinese support for the Burmese Communist Party till late 1980s<sup>68</sup> and Thailand's support to the ethnic minority refugees<sup>69</sup> have exacerbated the fear of foreign intervention into Myanmar. These have made a very deep imprint on the minds of the leaders and elites of Myanmar and created a sense of general fear and indifferent psychosis towards outside world.

The quasi-military regime which came to power in 2011 started reforming and opening up to the outside world. Their policy convinced the western world about Myanmar's desire to reintegrate with the international community and as a result most of the sanctions imposed earlier have been lifted. The new government has been handling the foreign policy very deftly. However, the latest foray by the Myanmar military on the Rohingyas has put the new government into defensive.

64 Egretau, Renaud and Larry Jagan, (2014), *"Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma: Understanding the Foreign Relations of the Burmese Praetorian State"*, pp-71-72

65 Ibid, p- 72

66 Steinberg, David I, *"Burma/Myanmar: What everyone needs to Know"*, (2013), p-21-22

67 Egretau and Jagan, Ibid, pp-62

68 Smith, Martin, *"Burma: Insurgency and the politics of Ethnicity"*, (1999), p-381

69 Egretau and Jagan, ibid, p-62



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## Understanding of Terrorism by the youth of Bangladesh

Md Sabbir Ahmed Jubaer<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*Who is likely to become a terrorist? Why one gets involved in terrorism? What are the motivations? What is terrorism by the way? These are the questions of much contestation in academic discourse of terrorism. Although terrorism has been officially defined and regulated by certain purposes and vested interests, this paper goes beyond such official definitions of terrorism to anthropologically examine how terrorism has been actually understood and explained by the youths of Bangladesh. The students of private universities as well as students of Qawmi Madrasas were the target group, who are often identified as vulnerable to terrorist motivation, but unfortunately, their voices and understandings about terrorism are never heard or prioritized. Anthropology of terrorism has now become a new dimension in academic discourse that studies terrorism not from the top but from the ground. In this disposition, it is argued that although Qawmi Madrasa students have long been under observation as a potential source of terrorism, recent involvement of the university students and faculty members in terrorism added to a completely new dimension to understanding terrorism, which demands a fresh mode of thinking. This study thus anthropologically examines how international politics, lack of democratic environment to suppress expressions, violation of human rights, depressive environment for the youth due to unemployment, rather pessimistic observation of the future, and declining family integrity contribute to recent surge of terrorism in Bangladesh. This study further makes some policy recommendations coming out of youths about how to combat terrorism.*

### Introduction

The world has seen an exponential rise in the number of terrorist attacks for the last 15 years (Jetter, 2014).<sup>2</sup> The research and work on terrorism has also risen after the event of September 11, 2001; however some literature

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2 Jetter, M. (2014). Terrorism and Media. IZA Discussion Paper No. 8497

on terrorism and counter terrorism prevailed earlier (De Mesquita, 2008).<sup>3</sup> Terrorism has been defined, regulated and operated by different actors on the basis of certain purposes and vested interests. The research on terrorism also highlights the different aspects of terrorism, including but not limited to the nature and causes of terrorism, counterterrorism policy, terrorism and radical mobilization, government-terrorist negotiations and the internal politics of terrorist organizations. This research has been conducted to explore how terrorism has been actually understood and explained by the youths of Bangladesh. It explores how the youths interpret “terrorism/terrorist” and how these interpretations relate to an understanding of “official” definitions used by the academicians and international organizations. The research examines why the youths are being attracted to terrorism and its motivational factors. This research further makes some policy recommendations as suggested by the youths.

## Conceptualizing Terrorism

Bjørge (2005) has stated that, “researchers have identified more than 200 definitions of terrorism but failed to agree on any one” (p. 1).<sup>4</sup> Dekmejian (2007) and Pillar (2001) have identified that one man’s terrorist activity is regarded another man’s freedom-fighting.<sup>5</sup> Ross (2006) agree that the words ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorist’ lack precision and objectivity, still these words are seen in regular life. They further add that no globally accepted definition of terrorism exists.<sup>6</sup> Hoffman (2006) argues that a terrorist “will never acknowledge he is a terrorist and moreover will go to great lengths to evade and obscure any such inference or connection” (p. 22). In support of his argument, Hoffman quotes the spiritual leader of a Lebanese terrorist group, who says: “we don’t see ourselves as terrorists because we don’t believe in terrorism and we don’t see resisting the occupier as a terrorist action” (p. 23). Thus what is considered terrorism is much more contested than its use in everyday life.

Despite such difficulties, different international agencies and authors define terrorism. Enders and Sandler (2011, p. 3) define terrorism as:

3 De Mesquita, E. B. (2008). The political economy of terrorism: A selective overview of recent work. *The Political Economist*, 10(1), 1-12.

4 Bjørge, T. (Ed.). (2004). *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, reality and ways forward*. New York: Routledge.

5 Dekmejian, R. H. (2007). *Spectrum of terror*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

6 Ross, J. I. (2006). *Political terrorism: An interdisciplinary approach*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

The pre-mediated use or threat to use violence by individuals or sub-national groups in order to obtain a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims<sup>7</sup>

According to the UN, “terrorism is the act of destroying or injuring civilian lives or the act of destroying or damaging civilian or government property without the expressly chartered permission of a specific government, this by individuals of groups acting independently...in the attempt to effect some political goal” (Cited in Enders and Sandler, 2011).<sup>8</sup> The significant characteristic of this definition is that it includes state terror as well. So if any government makes any act as terrorism, this definition will prevail and label that government as terrorist.

Different departments of the USA government such as U.S. State Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense also define terrorism in their own purpose, but these definitions do not match with each other. According to the US Department of State, terrorism means, “pre-mediated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (US Department of State, 2003, p. xiii). The significant feature of this definition is that it characterizes the victims as “noncombatants” that include all civilians, off-duty military people. The US Department of Defense (DoD) defines terrorism as the “unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives” (US Department of Defense, 1983). This definition included religious and ideological objectives along with political objective as motivations of terrorism.

Though these definitions vary somewhat but all the definitions have three factors in common with: the victim, the perpetrator and the audience. The victims are the targets of violence, whereas the perpetrators are those who commit violence, and the audience is those who are intimidated by the act of terror.

Terrorism can be seen in different perspectives such as domestic terrorism and transnational terrorism. Domestic terrorism is homegrown and has consequences just for the host country, its institutions, citizens, property and politics. Terrorism is transnational when an incident in one country involves

7 Enders, W., & Sandler, T. (2011). *The political economy of terrorism*. Cambridge University Press.

8 *ibid*

perpetrators, victims, institutions, government or citizens of another country (Enders and Sandler, 2011, p. 6).<sup>9</sup> According to Li, a transnational terrorist incident in a country involves three stakeholders- victims, perpetrators, targets, or institutions of another country (Li, 2005, p. 3).<sup>10</sup> These definitions made a clear distinction between domestic and transnational terrorism.

## Terrorism and Liberal Democracy

How are terrorist activities being affected by democracy and freedom of expression? Two arguments in the literature present opposite answers (see for example, Eyerman, 1998; Eubank and Weinberg, 1994).<sup>11,12</sup> The first argument says that under liberal democracies citizens enjoy some protections or facilities, which are also equally enjoyed by the terrorists. Thus, terrorists can make groups, networks and recruit new members quite easily in liberal democratic systems. There is freedom of speech in liberal democracy that is enjoyed by the terrorist groups to propagate their ideas. People exploit the benefit of globalization, for example to cross national borders to execute a big range attack, buy weapons from transnational networks, and receive training. Eubank and Weinberg (1994) shows that compared with authoritarian countries democratic countries have more terrorist networks. They conclude that terrorism is clearly linked with political and civil liberties.<sup>13</sup>

Other researchers disagree with these findings and argue that democracy reduces the rate of terrorism because it offers room for negotiation that allows would-be terrorists to come to discussion table (Schmid, 1992; Li, 2005).<sup>14</sup> In democratic societies, free and fair elections ensure smooth transition of the government that further ensures desirable social changes without violence (Schmid 1992). Using ITERATE cross-national time series data for the years 1968 to 1986, Eyerman (1998) argues that established democracies are less likely to experience terrorism than non-democracies, the newly formed democracies, however, are more likely to experience terrorism than other types of states. Thus, there are both pros and cons of liberal democracies in

9 Enders, W., & Sandler, T. (2011). *The political economy of terrorism*. Cambridge University Press.

10 Li, Q. (2005). Does democracy promote or reduce transnational terrorist incidents? *Journal of Conflict resolution*, 49(2), 278-297.

11 Eyerman, J. (1998). Terrorism and democratic states: Soft targets or accessible systems. *International Interactions*, 24(2), 151-170.

12 Eubank, W. L., & Weinberg, L. (1994). Does democracy encourage terrorism?. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 6(4), 417-435.

13 *ibid*

14 Schmid, A.P. (1992). Terrorism and democracy. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 4(4), 14-25.

connection with terrorism. My study will also examine how freedom of speech and other aspects of liberal democracy affect terrorism.

## Religion and Terrorism

One very central question of this research is to unveil whether religious teachings lead to radical mobilization and terrorism. Different arguments exist in the literature regarding this. One argument says that religion is not the principal cause of terrorism but is exploited by terrorists to achieve other goals (Sosis and Alcorta, 2008).<sup>15</sup> Others have argued that terrorists have mainly political goals, but not religious goals. (Bloom, 2005; Pape, 2005).<sup>16,17</sup> To attain these political goals, terrorists skip peaceful political means and use terrorism by intimidating people and thus leave their life at risk. These interpretations differ from that of Coyne (2016) who argues that the widespread Muslim beliefs in martyrdom and the attainment of paradise are apparently important factors in motivating terrorism and suicide bombing, which is evidenced by the terrorists' own statements and actions.<sup>18</sup> Atran (2002), on the other hand, argues that religion and its doctrines play a negligible role in terrorism.<sup>19</sup> Peter Bergen, who produced the first interview with Bin Laden in 1997, claimed in his book *Holy War, Inc.* that Bin Laden is a creature of the modern secular world (Bergen, 2003).<sup>20</sup> Rober A. Pape (2005), who studied the reasons behind suicide terrorism, in his book *Dying to Win*, shows that suicidal terrorism follows a strategic logic, not inspired by religious motivations. The logic made to exert pressure on modern liberal democracies to make significant territorial claims. Thus the relationship between religion and terrorism is not well established but academic debate still continues in literature.

## Terrorism and International Politics

Does international politics provoke global terrorism? It is argued that foreign intervention is 100 times more likely when the afflicted country has high oil

15 Sosis, R., & Alcorta, C. (2008). Militants and martyrs: Evolutionary perspectives on religion and terrorism. *Natural security: A Darwinian approach to a dangerous world*, 105-124.

16 Bloom, M. M. (2005). *Dying to kill: The Global Phenomenon of Suicide Terror*. New York. Columbia University Press.

17 Pape, R. (2005). *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House.

18 Coyne, J. A. (2016). Faith versus fact: Why science and religion are incompatible.

19 Atran, S. (2006). The moral logic and growth of suicide terrorism. *Washington Quarterly*, 29(2), 127-147.

20 Bergen, P. L. (2002). *Holy war, Inc.: inside the secret world of Osama bin Laden*. Simon and Schuster.



reserves than if it has none (Cited in Bawden, 2015).<sup>21</sup> Sajid (2015) reveals that terrorism is a \$1 billion industry and Multinational Terrorist Corporations (MTCs) have allegedly been supported by the developed countries to maintain dominance over the poor, the Islamic and third world countries. He coined MTC as an organization that is financed by different countries whose agenda is to create religious radicalization, terror, militancy and/or civil war in third world poor nations.<sup>22</sup> The evidence of this claim can be clearly seen in the case of Al-Qaida, which was funded by the USA, to fight against the Soviet Union, and it did the job well. Petras (2002) holds the view that USA may have done strategic politics about the attack of 9/11 on the World Trade Center to justify a worldwide military campaign to expand U.S. military bases and justify military intervention to control strategic oil producing regions. At the same time the anti-terrorist propaganda in the USA justifies the massive social cuts and vast increase in militarization, and to silence any voices which question the international terrorist conspiracy theory.<sup>23</sup> Thus, politicizing terrorism is a vast issue which requires a macro outlook to understand how a certain country or group benefits from it. The propaganda of terrorism surely affects youths of many different countries who are being attracted and motivated to sign-up by the terrorist groups.

## Ways to Combat Terrorism

It is of great concern among academics, governments and international organizations about how to effectively combat terrorism. Berman and Iannaccone (2005) have argued that creating an open space for religious expression will decline religious violence.<sup>24</sup> Atran (2003) recommends that the best defense against terrorism should be stopping potential recruits to join terrorist organizations.<sup>25</sup> Sosis and Alcorta (2005) also point out that adolescents are highly vulnerable to terrorism as they stay in the critical period of life. To prevent adolescents to join terrorist organizations, they recommend

21 Bawden, T. (2015, January 28). Intervention in civil wars 'far more likely in oil-rich nations'. Independent. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/intervention-in-civil-wars-far-more-likely-in-oil-rich-nations-10006648.html>

22 Sajid, M. S. (2015, December 5). A conspiracy theory of global terrorism. Daily Sabah. Retrieved from <http://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2015/12/05/a-conspiracy-theory-of-global-terrorism>

23 Petras, J. (2002). International Conspiracy Revisited: 9/11 Five Months Later. *Rebelión*.

24 Berman, E., & Iannaccone, L. R. (2005). Religious extremism: the good, the bad, and the deadly (No. w11663). National Bureau of Economic Research.

25 Atran, S. (2003). Genesis of suicide terrorism. *Science*, 299(5612), 1534-1539



promoting youth activities for adolescents.<sup>26</sup> In an article of CNN titled “How to fight terrorism and win”, it was suggested that an international coalition to be built that includes active, meaningful and consistent leadership from the Arab world. Another suggestion insists the technology giants in the world to contribute and volunteer their expertise and talent to help governments enhance security and prevent attacks. It was argued that recruitment of terrorists is done mainly through social media. So, the authority must build up expertise in this field to fight potential terrorists before they go for action.

Although these recommendations are relevant and wholistic, I argue that we need to listen to the actual people who deal with terrorism in their everyday life. Rather than these suggestions coming from ‘terrorism experts’, I believe that the people on the ground will be the right persons to share their experiences how to deal these issues more effectively. So, this study is an attempt to document the strategies suggested by the lay subjects on how to effectively combat terrorism.

## Findings and Analysis

### Understanding of Terrorism by the Youth

In Bangla, terrorism is generally termed as *sontrash*, *rahajani*, *nashokota* and *jangibad*. All the respondents agree that terrorism is an unacceptable act in society, creates social disorder and that terrorists must be brought to book. No one likes the idea to see their relatives or friends be involved with terrorism. However their definitions of terrorism differed from one another. One respondent defines terrorism as, “to make harm or kill people illegally”. “The activities that are outside of humanity are terrorism.”, said the other one. Another respondent says, “To create disorder and chaos in society is terrorism”. Though the definitions differ from each other distinctively, there are certain commonalities.

The knowledge of terrorism is socially constructed among the youths of Bangladesh. Galbin (2014) defines social constructionism as a knowledge of sociology and communication that assesses mutually developed understandings of the surroundings.<sup>27</sup> Gergen (1985) states that social constructionism is a perspective which argues that a great amount of human

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26 Alcorta, C. S., & Sosis, R. (2005). Ritual, emotion, and sacred symbols. *Human nature*, 16(4), 323-359.

27 Galbin, A. (2014). An introduction to social constructionism. *Social Research Reports*, (26), 82-92.

life exists due to social and interpersonal influences (p. 265).<sup>28</sup> Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue that there are different realities in this complex world where we live and our meanings, experiences, feelings, and responsiveness of reality are thus mutually constructed in the society.<sup>29</sup> In a similar tone Dant (1991) argues that we act, react, interpret and perceive happenings by how they are understood in our own social structure (p.1).<sup>30</sup> We make our everyday reality through the communication of culture, such as language, pictures, movies, television, jokes, music, dance, plays, novels, and even tattoos; this cultural communication “knowledge truth” is evident in our major societal institutions (Dant, 1991).<sup>31</sup> Berger and Luckman (Cited in Galvin, 2014, p. 84) state that people socially construct reality by their use of agreed and shared meaning; language is the means to communicate the shared meaning. Thus, our beliefs about the world are social inventions. Here ‘reality’ about terrorism is created with the shared knowledge of youths with each other and with the surroundings like friends, families, neighbors and academic institutes. They have various sources of knowledge on terrorism. “We cannot pick up a newspaper or watch or listen to a newscast without seeing or hearing some reference to terrorism” (Ross, 2006, p. 2).<sup>32</sup> So the youths watch news about terrorism on television and read in newspapers. They develop some knowledge on terrorism. They meet their peers in educational institutes or in workplace and share their knowledge with each other. Thus a common knowledge on terrorism is developed. Berger and Luckmann (1991) maintain that conversation is the most significant tool to maintain, modify and reconstruct subjective reality.<sup>33</sup> Such a framework of constructionism helps us achieve a deeper realization of state’s varying responses to terrorism by going deep into the complexities of the construction of reality based on history and cultural factors that gives individuals the ability to build meaning for reality (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2013).<sup>34</sup>

So youths construct knowledge of terrorism from their knowledge of

28 Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American psychologist*, 40(3), 266.

29 Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

30 Dant, T. (1991). *Knowledge, Ideology and Discourse A Sociological Perspective*. New York: Routledge.

31 *ibid*

32 Ross, J. I. (2006). *Political terrorism: An interdisciplinary approach*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

33 Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1991). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge* (No. 10). Penguin UK.

34 Baylis, J., Smith, S., & Owens, P. (2013). *The globalization of world politics: An introduction to international relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

surroundings. A Palestinian's knowledge of terrorism differs from that of a Bangladeshi and eventually from European one. Whereas Palestinians define terrorism mainly as demolition of their houses by Israeli soldiers, people of Western countries mostly see terrorism as activities of Islamic militants. Surprisingly, during cold war, western people would consider violence by communist organizations as terrorism and Islamic terrorism was not a burning issue that time. But after 9/11, terrorism and Islamic terrorism are now seen equally. In 1990s, Sinhalese people would think that guerrilla attacks by Tamil militants are terrorism. Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggest, a person constructs reality in every social interaction: with the self; in one-on-one interactions; in small and large gatherings; with their own culture; and with other cultures.<sup>35</sup>

The definitions given by youths are distinct from academic ones. As we saw earlier, the definition of terrorism given by academic and institutional actors ensures the existence of purpose behind terrorism as evident in the definition of US Department of State that conditioned terrorism as politically motivated (US Department of State, 2003, p. xiii). But the youths' definitions lack the condition of purpose. Thus any casualty caused without any political goal is seen as the event of terrorism by the youth, unlike the academic definitions who always sets a condition of political objective. Another clear difference is that the definitions of terrorism given by youths hint the existence of only two kinds of actors involved with terrorism: perpetrator and victim. Their definitions do not mention the existence of one more actor- audience which is included in the definitions given by the academic and institutional definitions with significant emphasis as Enders and Sandler (2011) describes terrorism happening necessarily through the intimidation of a large audience.<sup>36</sup>

## **Motivations to be involved in Terrorism**

The respondents shared some of the motivational factors that they think are working behind terrorism. All the causes that the respondents mentioned have already reflected in the academic discourse. The causes that most of the respondents shared are outlined below.

### **International Politics**

Most of the respondents said that there is an international politics behind terrorism happening in the Middle Eastern and some other countries. According

35 Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. New York.

36 Enders, W., & Sandler, T. (2011). *The political economy of terrorism*. Cambridge University Press.

to them, western countries seek to maintain dominance over developing countries. So terrorism is being used as a tool to exert the dominance. The strategy is, according to their claim, sponsoring terrorists in the target country which most of the time would fall into civil war. This further provides legitimacy to western countries to interfere into the affected countries because the interventions are justified in the name of protecting human rights. The purpose is obvious; to keep hand on abundant natural resources of affected countries and to ensure the profitable business of arms industries in western countries. This view is echoed in Sajid (2015) who revealed data that terrorism industry is a \$1 billion enterprise now, one that was internationalized in the 21st century.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Petras (2002) argues that USA carried out politics about the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. He argues that Washington's purpose was to justify a worldwide military campaign to expand U.S. military bases.<sup>38</sup>

Some other respondents argue that another purpose behind funding terrorism is to weaken the economy of rival countries. The countries that are flourishing with emerging economy may be a future threat for those who at present have strong economic base. So weakening their economy is necessary to sustain their position. Some respondents convicted Islamic States (IS) to be the creation of the West. One respondent said:

Money is a must to continue terrorism for several years. Where IS gets money from? Surely some parties want civil war to happen in Middle Eastern countries that somehow benefits them with the resources that those countries have.

These claims are supported by some researches that show that oil is a motivating factor behind foreign-country intervention. It is argued that foreign intervention is 100 times more likely when the afflicted country has high oil reserves than if it has none (Cited in Bawden, 2015).<sup>39</sup>

## Religion as a Motivation

When asked the question whether religion provokes terrorism, all respondents said that true religion does not promote terrorism; rather spread peace and

37 Sajid, M. S. (2015, December 5). A conspiracy theory of global terrorism. Daily Sabah. Retrieved from <http://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2015/12/05/a-conspiracy-theory-of-global-terrorism>

38 Petras, J. (2002). International Conspiracy Revisited: 9/11 Five Months Later. *Rebelión*.

39 Bawden, T. (2015, January 28). Intervention in civil wars 'far more likely in oil-rich nations'. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/intervention-in-civil-wars-far-more-likely-in-oil-rich-nations-10006648.html>

harmony in the society. However, some respondents conceded that there is an indirect relationship exists between terrorism and religion. To them, religion may be used by terrorist groups to recruit terrorists as human beings are weak with religion. One respondent said:

Religion is an area of emotion for people. People can easily be recruited when they are convinced that their religion have been under attack. To protect the religion, the enemies of that religion must be eliminated. Thus, young people are brainwashed by evil people to serve their political goals.

These statements reflect the arguments of other studies that religion is not the root cause of terrorism but is used by terrorists to achieve other goals (Sosis and Alcorta, 2008). Many findings suggest that terrorists have mainly political goals, not religious goals (Bloom, 2005; Pape, 2005). The definition of terrorism given by Enders and Sandler (2011) has clearly shown that terrorism is done to obtain a political or social objective. These interpretations differ from that of Coyne (2016) who argue that the widespread Muslim beliefs in martyrdom and the attainment of paradise are apparently important factors in motivating terrorism and suicide bombing, as evidenced by the terrorists' own statements and actions.<sup>40</sup>

### **Lack of Freedom of Expression**

Most of the respondents said that lack of freedom of expression and speech is a major reason that guides youths toward terrorism. Youths want to show their grievance through associations, writings and movements. If these doors are closed, then they follow alternative means to express their grievances by switching to extremist approaches. One respondent mentioned:

People have diverse political views and thinking. They want to mobilize people in favor of their view. If they are restricted to raise their voice, they turn to alternative approach and commit terrorism.

This view is reflected with some other findings that liberal democratic countries where people have freedom of expression have lower level of risk for terrorism as Schmid (1992) has argued that, in democratic societies, free and fair elections ensure that rulers can be removed and that desirable social changes can be brought about by voters, reducing the need to resort to violence.<sup>41</sup> But this argument differs from that of Eubank and Weinberg

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40 Coyne, J. A. (2016). Faith versus fact: Why science and religion are incompatible.

41 Schmid, A. P. (1992). Terrorism and democracy. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 4(4), 14-25.

(1994) who showed with statistical records that democratic countries have more terrorist groups than authoritarian ones. They conclude that terrorism is positively linked with political and civil liberties.

## **Unemployment**

A good number of respondents hold the view that unemployment and lack of opportunity may be responsible for severe depression among the youths which in turn may lead them towards terrorism. According to them, depression comes from various factors like lack of career opportunity and lack of opportunity to proper grooming. Many youths who got postgraduate degrees but are unable to find any jobs may feel frustration and possess a negative attitude towards life. Once they are frustrated, they become vulnerable to terrorist motivations.

This study thus anthropologically reveals how international politics, lack of democratic environment to suppress expressions, and depressive environment for the youth due to unemployment, rather pessimistic observation of the future, contribute to recent surge of terrorism in Bangladesh.

## **Recommendations As Suggested to Combat Terrorism**

“What measures should be taken to combat terrorism?” was the question asked to all the respondents. The suggestions that came out were mainly the strategies to reduce the risk of terrorism. The most commonly answered recommendations are outlined below:

### **Increased Family Integration**

According to respondents, most of the parents are always busy in their work life, whereas due to digitization their kids are highly smart nowadays. Parents hardly have time for their children. They do not know what their children do alone at home, which internet sites s/he browses, with whom they make friendship and which ideologies they cultivates. The concern here is that terrorists are recruited online through social networking sites and other websites. So the respondents recommend the parents to take care of their children up to a certain level. Their responsibility does not end up the time when kids start going to school. This view is reflected in the arguments of Schlaffer (2013), an Austrian social scientist and gender activist, who believes that a mother can curb conflicts and extremist ideas within her family. Since women, mothers in particular, possess the unique ability to recognize early

warning signs of radicalization in their children; they can play a key role in curtailing violent extremism. As a policy implication, she suggests that mothers have to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and self-confidence to become active players in the security arena and to be aware of their potential in influencing and guiding their children's lives, and in preventing them from engaging in terrorist activities.<sup>42</sup>

## **Engage in Extra Curricular Activities**

Most of the respondents hold the view that engagement in extracurricular activities reduces the risk of involvement with terrorist activities. They argue that youths are always adventurous and seek to stand out from the crowd. They have to be given space to put their potential into action. The absence of this creativity may lead them towards alternative violent activities. This view is reflected in Sosis and Alcorta (2005) who say that adolescents are highly vulnerable to terrorism as they stay in the critical period of life. To prevent adolescents to join terrorist organizations, respondents recommend promoting more extracurricular activities for adolescents.

## **Develop Critical Thinking**

Some of the respondents have argued that people with higher level of critical thinking are less vulnerable to terrorist motivation. So they suggest building an education system that facilitates critical thinking among students. What is critical thinking by the way? Cambridge Dictionary defines critical thinking as the process of thinking carefully about a subject or idea, without allowing feelings or opinions to affect you ("critical thinking," n.d.). So critical thinking leads a person to carefully think about a new subject or idea at first before accepting or rejecting it. One respondent said:

Our education system is based on memorization. Students are given books, lecture sheets which they try to memorize. They do not think critically whether those pieces of information are correct or not. The long term impact of this system is terrible. When these students are convinced that their religion is in danger and they need to sacrifice their lives, they passively accept that call without thinking twice.

This argument is reflected by Atallah (2011) who stated that weak critical thinking skills cause Muslims to support global Salafi jihad. The respondents in this study also suggest education reform in the country such a way that

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42 Schlaffer, E. (2013, May 17). Can Mothers stop Terrorism? Thomson Reuters Foundation News. Retrieved from <http://news.trust.org/item/20130513111845-mnx3p/>



it promotes critical thinking. With a higher critical thinking, those who are invited by terrorist recruiters will think twice before fall prey to the invitation. Thus critical thinking is considered to them as the key to curbing terrorism worldwide.<sup>43</sup>

These are the major policy recommendations coming out of youths about how to combat terrorism. The recommendations are to lessen the future risk of terrorism. However, no policy recommendation came out from them as preventive strategies in violence affected area.

## Conclusion

This study has examined how terrorism is understood and explained by various social actors, particularly by the youths of Bangladesh. The possible motivational factors behind terrorism have been examined according to the Perspectives of the youths. Some of the recommendations have also been identified. The findings of this study suggest that terrorism does not have any globally accepted definition. Academicians, national and international organizations define terrorism by certain interests and vested opportunities. On the other hand, the concept of terrorism is socially constructed. By watching contents of terrorism on television and by reading news of violence in newspaper, youths got some motivations towards terrorism in their mind. This knowledge is shared with each other, thus making a shared common knowledge. It is a widely held view that international politics may also play an important role behind terrorism which is prevalent in Middle Eastern and other countries having natural wealth. Other possible causes include lack of freedom and grievance. According to them, religion does not directly provoke violence, but it is used to attain other political purposes. The policy implications of the research suggest more family integration and role of the parents to interact more with other family members spend time to take care of them. Educational Institutions should create an environment of extracurricular activities along with regular academic courses. Last but not the least, is to reform the educational system in a way where students will not passively memorize their lessons; rather, they actively participate in creating knowledge through conscious critical thinking. The state should also play a proactive role by not just allowing higher educational institutions, which only gives certificates, but also create job opportunities to absorb the educated youths so that they might not be frustrated to be easily motivated towards terrorism.

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43 Atallah, S. (2011). Education, Critical Thinking, and Terrorism: The Reproduction of Global Salafi Jihad in Contemporary Egypt. (Doctoral dissertation, Brown University).



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## Bangladesh Myanmar Interplay Prosperity: Prospects & Challenges

*Abu Mohammad Siddique Alam<sup>1</sup>*

### **Abstract**

Bangladesh and Myanmar are two neighboring country have a historical connection and relationship. These two countries had a good transport network, trade and commerce relation and also shared common heritage and culture in many aspects. This relationship was later hampered by various socio-economic and political reasons. Myanmar's long run military rule, separation from the rest of the world, lower economic activities were the main reason for it. The relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh was characterized by both prospective and challenging. This study attempted to find out this challenges and prospects of bilateral relationship. For the development of Bangladesh, it is essential to establish and maintain closer friendship with its neighbours. The relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar is cordial. There is no major problem or conflict between the two countries except Rohingya issue. This problem is also solved through diplomacy. Having solved the political problem, Bangladesh can make all-out effort to strengthen its economic relations with Myanmar for going to be an economic giant at the doorstep of Bangladesh. Therefore, both Bangladesh and Myanmar can address the existing problems for boosting bilateral trade and economic cooperation.

### **1. Introduction**

Bangladesh-Myanmar relations officially began on 13 January 1972, the date on which Myanmar, as the sixth state, accorded recognition to Bangladesh as a sovereign country. Since then, friendly relations had been prevailing between both the countries with some occasional ups and downs.<sup>2</sup> The historical links

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2 Yunus Ali Sheikh," Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations : Recent Politico-Economic Developments", BFPS Journal, October-December 1996, P. 14.

between both the countries can be traced back beyond nineteenth century. Despite the ethnic and linguistic differences, both the countries have had traditional commercial and cultural ties since long. Besides, both the countries were under the British-India control for a considerable period of time.

Myanmar is a geographic junction for the overlapping south, southeast and East Asia regions. Myanmar covers only 256 kilometers of common borderline with Bangladesh on her west. Since independence, Myanmar has experienced military regime for about three decades. Despite some discords on various issues, the present relationship between the two countries can be described as cordial. There are all the possibilities that the diplomatic, cultural and economic relationship between these two countries will improve further. But, the chances of any future political and military conflicts between the two cannot be ruled out completely. Myanmar's recent development of her armed forces and some of her activities compelled Bangladesh to draw a new threat perception.

Foreign policy of an independent country is the integral part of its overall national policy. Like all the independent countries of the world, Bangladesh has a distinct policy to conduct its both national and foreign activities. Foreign policy principles are enshrined in the constitution of Bangladesh. The constitution defines the direction of the country's foreign policy has been referred to the topic of 4 are: (a) respect for the equality and sovereignty, peaceful solution to the conflict, and will not interfere in the internal affairs of another state; (b) avoidance of the use of force, and general and complete disarmament efforts; (c) to determine its own socio-economic and political system, and the formation and recognition of the rights of every nation; and (d) to support the struggle of oppressed peoples throughout the world. By not only the writings of constitution but also the activities and performances of Bangladesh in international arena has represented the liberal image towards other states. The motto of Bangladesh is to establish itself as an active participant in international relations. By the constitution of Bangladesh it is clear to us that Bangladesh desires to have policies, which could meet the economic goals and security of the people of Bangladesh. Therefore, cooperative relations with Myanmar are not a utopia for the people of Bangladesh. Not only the government of Bangladesh but also the common citizens have positive response to building cooperative relations with Myanmar. We have different views of making relations with India and Pakistan where Myanmar is a positive choice for most the people of Bangladesh. This paper will try to understand the aspects of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations. There are always some hurdles in making relations with someone, we have some issues that we should call the challenges of our relations, these challenges or hurdles will be discussed at this paper. Last of all the approaches of both countries in vice-versa with the recent activities of advancing the relations will be discussed precisely.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations have a great significance in our foreign policy. Myanmar is the next door neighbor of our country. Bangladesh shares land border, maritime boundary, river, political and economic issues, and many other things (such as culture, religion etc.) with Myanmar. The geo-strategic location of Bangladesh and Myanmar signify that without a strong bilateral relation both countries will suffer in many ways. National interests will also be affected. It is to be that we can change our friend but we cannot change our neighbor. Recently Myanmar opened up its door to international community. Eastern and Western countries are showing their interest in Myanmar. It is the greatest change in Myanmar foreign policy. Bangladesh should take the opportunity. In foreign policy, upholding national interests are the key points. And thus security issues (Land border security, maritime security, economic security etc.) get prominence in foreign policy. In this study, realistic approach is applied to conceptualize Bangladesh-Myanmar relations on the basis of national interest and national security perspective. I have tried to find out the current nature and magnitude of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations in terms of Myanmar's recent political and economic reforms. Author has also tried to find out the key players and issues which are responsible for hampering Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations. It is a matter of regret that Myanmar is our first door neighbor. Lack of connectivity (people to people, Government to Government, road, air and railway etc.), lack of knowledge about Myanmar, misunderstanding and mistrust, information gap, long time military rule and restrictions on Myanmar were the main obstacles to establish a cooperative and strong bilateral relations between two countries. Now Bangladesh needs to take Myanmar as a country full of potentials. Therefore, it is in our national interest to establish strong ties with Myanmar based on diplomatic, strategic, economic and social considerations.

## 1.3 Objective of the Research

The basic purpose of this paper is to investigate current nature and magnitude of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. It aims to examine recent political and economic reforms in Myanmar. It explains challenges and opportunities in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. The specific objectives include: - Identifying the key interests of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Explaining the basic information about Myanmar (like its history, population, language, government system, culture, religion, economy, geo-strategy, state policy, domestic political culture, national interest, ethnic conflict, challenges, opportunities, natural resources, energy, connectivity, regional power etc.) to understand Myanmar as our neighbor country. Investigating the contribution

of non-state actors (regional and sub-regional organizations like BIMSTEC, BCIM, ASEAN, ARF etc.) in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. Explore future directions for strengthening Bangladesh-Myanmar relations.

## 2. Current Relationship Between Bangladesh-Myanmar

The Relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar is not hostile or closed. However, there are some crucial factors that determine the relations hostile or close. Specifically both the states have some different experiences of conducting the state and for that; these differences are considered the turning point of their bilateral relations. Before analyzing the current stage of relations of both states, it is important to learn the previous initiatives of both the countries to develop relations in different sectors. Myanmar had their independence in 1948 a long time before Bangladesh got its independence in 1971 from Pakistan. Before the independence of Bangladesh, when it was a part of independent Pakistan, in 1966 an agreement to demarcate land boundary was signed with Myanmar<sup>3</sup>.

In 1980, border agreement for cooperation was signed; in 1988, an agreement for demarcation of land section of the boundary north of Naaf river was signed; an understanding to have foreign secretary level annual talks touching economic links has been agreed to; and a joint trade commission was established to discuss trade matters<sup>4</sup>. These agreements of cooperation are important to understand the current state of relations. The longstanding maritime dispute between Bangladesh and Myanmar came to an end after the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea gave its final verdict on 14 March 2012<sup>5</sup>. It was a good sign that Myanmar accepted the verdict. Below are more discussions about the current relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

## 3. Bangladesh's Policy Towards Myanmar

Bangladesh has more interests of building good economic and political relations with Myanmar. Other powerful states like United States, China and India are now looking for taking advantages from Myanmar by building constructive relations with it.

Bangladesh has some disturbing issues like Rohingya, illegal trade in border area and land boundary problems with Myanmar but Bangladesh did not react loudly. Bangladesh took the support of International Tribunal for the Law of

3 Ashfaqur Rahman. "Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations-The Economic Dimension." *Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies (CFAS)*, (2013):5

4 Ibid.4.

5 EAST ASIA FORUM, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/04/26/bangladesh-and-myanmar-resolve-longstanding-maritime-dispute/> (Accessed on 08 November 2015).

the Sea to settle their dispute. And it is also trying to solve the Rohingya issue and Land boundary problems peacefully. These are because that Bangladesh has its economic vision with Myanmar and also political vision.

### 3.1 Political Relations

Political relations are important for understanding and advancing the bilateral relations of both the countries. Bangladesh embassy was set up in Yangon in April 1972. Many exchanges of visits at high and top levels have taken place since then to promote relationship through mutual confidence and understanding. Both the sides expressed and assured furthering the relations between the countries. Despite having a cordial political relation, serious friction developed in 1978 following the dispute relating to the forced pushing out of approximately 200,000 Arakanese Muslims into Bangladesh<sup>6</sup>. Though the problem was resolved diplomatically; 2,50,877 refugees from Rakhine state crossed over and took shelter again in Bangladesh in 1991<sup>7</sup>. Bangladesh succeeded in repatriating the bulk of the refugee's unto mid-1996<sup>8</sup>. Approximately 500,000 Rohingyas are now in Bangladesh according to a report of Ahmad Ibrahim<sup>9</sup> in 2014. This Rohingya refugee issue is a core problem between the mutual relations. Another disconcerting issue is that the demand for yearly toll from the bordering villagers by the Arakan Army. The Myanmar insurgents are reported to be one of the sources of small arms proliferation in the region. They are also engaged in poppy cultivation in the region.

Other issues of contentions are:

- a. Concentration of forces and frequent border violations.
- b. Alleged assistance by Bangladesh to Myanmar insurgents.

### 3.2 Security Relations

In fact, there was no scope of enhancing security relations between the two countries until the time a high level military delegation led by the chief of General Staff of Bangladesh Army visited Myanmar in August 1997<sup>10</sup>. Presently, officers from Myanmar Army are undergoing training in Bangladesh Armed

6 Ahamad Ibrahim, "*The Rohingya: A History of Persecution*" at The Daily Star on 09 June, 2014.

7 Ibid.,

8 Ibid.,

9 Ibid.,

10 Obayedul Hoque Patwary, "*Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations: The Security Dimension*", Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), (2013):3.



Forces institutions. The military relationship between the two countries is seen to have improved. Myanmar's military build-up along our border gives a different picture. Myanmar had only five infantry Battalions along Bangladesh and India borders before. However, it has been reported that western command of Myanmar army with thirty-four infantry battalions, one Artillery Regiment, two Engineer Battalions and other affiliated units are operating presently along Bangladesh border alone<sup>11</sup>. However, at present there is no military conflict between the two countries rather recently the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) rescued two Myanmar army personnel who were believed to have been abducted by a separatist group of the neighbouring country<sup>12</sup>. This situation made the environment more cooperative than before. Dr. A. S. M. Ali Ashraf, distinguish scholar from University of Dhaka, thinks that Security challenges like military threats, irregular trafficking, border smuggling, informal trade are major barriers to cooperative economic relations with Myanmar<sup>13</sup>.

### 3.3 Economic Relations

Despite having the General Trade Agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar, signed in August 1973, the bilateral trade did not develop to its desired level. Despite the wide possibilities for cooperation, positive interactions between the countries have been rare, slow to develop, and have often consisted of formal or symbolic actions rather than substantive engagement. In reality however, trade between the two countries has been negligible, with far more attention devoted to drug smuggling, refugees, and territorial disputes in the border areas. Cross-border trade was formally legalized in 1994, and the volume of this border trade in fact exceeds sea-borne trade between the states. The border trade is hampered by the fact that there is no cross-border link. In the past decade Myanmar and Bangladesh have aimed for and achieved \$100-million (USD) in bilateral trade, the volume of this exchange has risen from \$50 million in 2001-02, to \$60 million in 2005-06, to as much as \$140 million in the past two years<sup>15</sup>.

The recent trade upsurge aside, the Bangladesh and Myanmar still have no official agreements on investment, shipping, tourism, currency exchange, or even a direct cross-border road link. Since 2006 electricity shortage, Bangladesh has actively pursued the purchase of hydroelectricity produced in Arakan State, with some proposals involving the Bangladesh government financing the construction of a major hydroelectric facility- the Laymro Dam-investing

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11 "BGB rescue two Myanmar army men in Bandarban." *theindependent*,

12 Author's personal interview with Dr. A. S. M. Ali Ashraf, Assistant Professor of the Dept. of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

13 Retrieved from [http://www.arakanrivers.net/?page\\_id=42](http://www.arakanrivers.net/?page_id=42)

perhaps as much as \$1 Billion USD, in return for substantial percentage of the electricity (up to 70%)<sup>14</sup>. In the latest development, in September 2010, it was announced that the two countries would sign a Memorandum of Understanding to build two dams in Arakan State, in the Marmchaung and Laymro areas. The dams will supply power to Bangladesh's Cox's Bazaar and will be jointly built by SHwe Taung Development Company and a Chinese company. The total quantity of electricity is expected to be around 575 megawatts, with one dam providing the bulk 500 MW and a second smaller one 75 MW. There are many other sectors that have created interest for both the countries.

### 3.4 Cultural Relations

Despite having no cultural agreement, Bangladesh has been giving considerable importance to the promotion of cultural ties with Myanmar. A number of exchanges of cultural troupes between the two countries had taken place in the past. A 23 member's cultural team visited Myanmar on June 1995<sup>15</sup>. However, inspired by a common desire to further strengthen close cultural ties and to promote mutual understanding and knowledge between their people, both the countries have agreed to sign a Cultural Agreement<sup>16</sup>. In 2003, a Bangladeshi cultural troupe of 116 members performed their cultural show at trade fair in Myanmar<sup>17</sup>. We hope that the process of cultural exchanges will rise between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

## 4. Significances of the Cooperation Between Bangladesh And Myanmar

There are many fields, which are yet to be considered for the mutual beneficial of both the countries. This chapter, the significances of the cooperative relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar will address those fields that should be given more importance. Here I will analyze three important aspects (economic, geo-politics and security), most interesting.

### 4.1 Economic Aspects

Economic status is now the most influential instrument of international system. Therefore, inside or outside, it is always important to keep a strong

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14 Retrieved from [http://www.arakanrivers.net/?page\\_id=42](http://www.arakanrivers.net/?page_id=42)

15 Kamrul Islam, *"The Future of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relationship and its effect on the Region"*

16 Ibid., 6.

17 Ibid.,19.

sustainable economy for the state. The economic strengths of Myanmar can also make us understand about the potentials of our economic dimensions of cooperation.

- a. Myanmar's area is 676,577 Sq. Km, which is 5 times larger than us.
- b. Myanmar's coastline is 2832 km long which is 4.8 times greater Bangladesh's.
- c. The Arakan mountain range separates Rakhine and Chin States bordering Bangladesh from the rest of Myanmar. These two states in Myanmar, the Rakhine and the China have:
  - I. Limestone (Millions of tons).
  - II. Timber.
  - III. Various Minerals.
- d. Myanmar has a liberal policy of leasing land for agro-based industries. It exempts tax for 2-8 years, with provision for income tax waiver for 3 years.
- e. Myanmar has extensive natural gas deposits. Exploration with the help of Chinese and Korean Companies are on the way; Hydropower is a major source of energy. The mountains are a great reserve and enough electricity can be generated for export by Myanmar.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 1: Myanmar's GDP Growth Rate Per Capita**

Period	Average GDP Growth Rate	Average GDP Growth Rate Per Capita
1971-1980	4.2	1.8
1981-1990	1.4	-0.4
1991-2000	7.1	5.7
2001-2010	12.1	11.3

(Source: UNCTAD statistics, 2011)

It is important to consider the decade-wise GDP growth and average GDP growth per capita of Myanmar. The statistics are presented in table 1. It can be inferred that the state of affairs of the economy was at the minimum efficiency during the decade 1981-90. However, the latter decades experienced higher

18 Ashfaqur Rahman. "Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations-The Economic Dimension." *Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies (CFAS)*, (2013): 5

levels of prosperity and this is evident from the higher echelon reached by the GDP figure in the later decades at 7.1 percent and 12.1 percent. Similarly, GDP per capita suffered severe setbacks in the 1990s but recovered and grew in the latter decades.

According to former Foreign Minister Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, “Bangladesh is enjoying the geo-strategic advantage to be situated at the connecting point between South and Southeast Asia. Bangladesh needs to translate its geo-strategic location into economic opportunities and tangible outcomes. BIMSTEC, as a link between the two regions, can help us in achieving that goal. The geographical contiguity, the historical and cultural commonalities and economic complementarities bind the BMSTEC Member States together in forging further collaborative engagements. Under the aegis of BIMSTEC, we are also cooperating on important areas like poverty alleviation, climate change, agriculture, health, technology, counter-terrorism and transnational crime, cultural cooperation and tourism.

## 4.2 Opportunity of Investment

As Myanmar has opened its market to the rest of the world, like other countries Bangladeshi businesspersons are getting prepared to invest millions of dollars in Myanmar. A good number of Bangladeshi businesspersons under the banner of Bangladesh-Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BMCCI) and the Bangladesh Myanmar Business Promotion Council (BMBPC) have already started investing in various sectors of both countries<sup>19</sup>. Government of Bangladesh is also patronizing the rising entrepreneurs who want to trade with Myanmar. The bank sector of Bangladesh also comes to the front to give loans and advise to the rising entrepreneurs of Bangladesh. BMBPC Chairman Syed Mahmudul Huq said in an interview, “there are opportunities to invest in Myanmar’s service sector including telecom, information technology, tourism, aviation, fish and aquaculture, and agro-based industry. These sectors are very attractive to businesspersons of Bangladesh and they are trying to capture these sectors before anyone hand into these. He also added that “Contact farming in Myanmar will help Bangladesh to meet its food demand as the underdeveloped agrarian country is going to extend the land lease tenure to 70 years from the existing 30 years”. Therefore, we think it is a golden chance for the businesspersons of Bangladesh and we hope that the obstacles would not create this process of cooperation.

On the other hand, Bangladesh has become a great potential of foreign investment in the recent times. The World Bank calls it the Bangladesh

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<sup>19</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.myanmar-business.org/2016/06/bangladeshi-businessemen-poised-to.html>

Paradox. The country scores particularly well on socio-economic indicators. Global banks and multilateral institutions present a highly optimistic outlook: Citi, Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan, and Merrill lynch have identified Bangladesh as a key investment opportunity<sup>20</sup>. There are various sectors in Bangladesh that need investment like infrastructure, technology, industry and communication.

**Table 2: Myanmar's Share in the Global Arena**

Year	Myanmar's Exports as a shear of world export	Myanmar's Imports as a shear of world Imports	Myanmar's FDI as a shear of world FDI
1995	0.02	0.03	0.09
2000	0.04	0.04	0.01
2005	0.04	0.02	0.03
2010	0.06	0.03	0.06

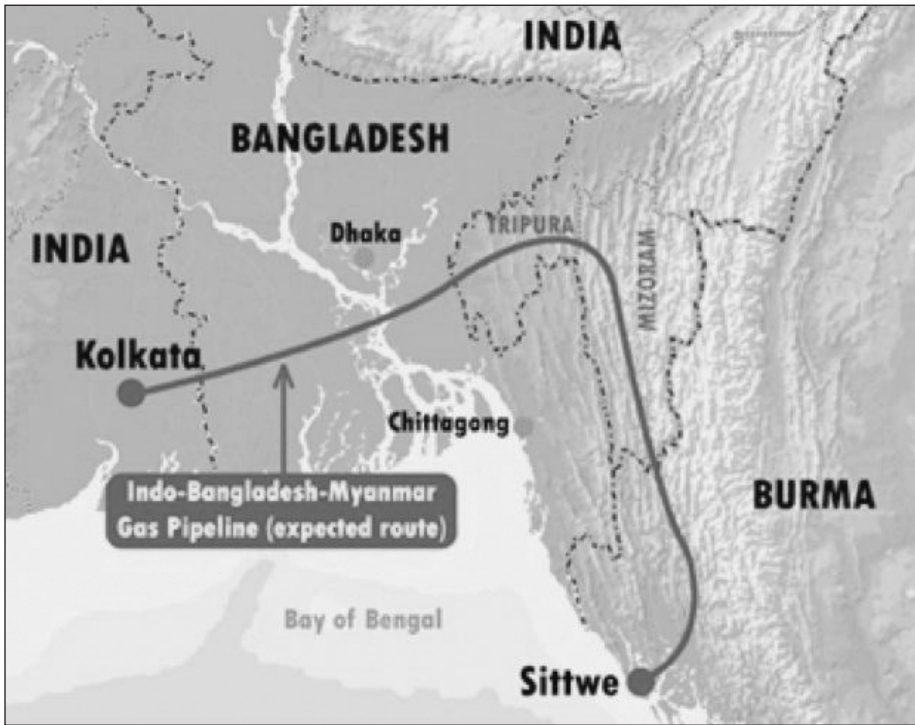
(Source: UNCTAD statistics, 2011)

### 4.3 Prospect of Export and Import

His potentials of building cooperative relations with Myanmar are creating huge sources of import and export opportunity with Myanmar. The statistics show that in fiscal year 2012-13, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$13.67 million to Myanmar and imported goods of \$484 million from there. The amount of exported goods of Bangladesh is lower than the amount of Myanmar. Therefore, for the balance of trade between the two countries, it is imperative for Bangladesh to seek the market for exporting more goods in the future. The goods that are Bangladesh's major export to Myanmar are frozen food, agric-products, chemical products, leather, jute goods, knitwear, woven garments, rice, lentils, fish and timber. On the other hand, Bangladesh imports live animal, vegetable products, prepared foodstuffs, beverages, tobacco, plastics, raw hides and skin, leather, wood and articles of woods, footwear, textiles, and article of human hair.

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20. "Untapped Investment Opportunities in Bangladesh." *Asia Society*, <http://asiasociety.org/untapped-investment-opportunities-bangladesh> (Accessed on 02 November 2016)



**Figure 1: Prospect of Export and Import**

In 2010, at a meeting of Joint Trade Commission (JTC), the two neighbors decided to raise annual bilateral trade from \$100 million to \$500 million and the meeting also discussed, among other issues, expansion of border trade, cooperation in various sectors including agriculture, food, fisheries, power and mineral resources, introduction of direct shipping services between the two nations to increase trade. These are the signs that make us sense about the rising cooperative relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar. There are some important areas of economic cooperation encompassing investment in Myanmar and in Bangladesh, tourism, teak wood, cane, marine fishing, prawn farming, livestock breeding, construction, motels, ceramic pottery, manufacturing, rubies/sapphire/jade/pearls polishing etc. These areas should be analyzed briefly and make the procedures of starting the process of investment as soon as possible. We know that Bangladesh is deeply interested to make deal about trading with Myanmar.

**Table 3: Bangladesh –Myanmar Trade (Goods).**

Products	Export in 2009-2010 (USD)	Products	Import in 2009-2010 (USD)
Exports to Myanmar	10.0	Imports from Myanmar	69.6
Pharmaceutical	5.6	Wood and articles of wood	43.6
Iron and Steel	3.3	Vegetable products	25.4
Salt, Sulpher, Earth, Cement, Stone, Plaster and Lime	0.3	Prepared Beverages, Spirit, Foodstuffs; vinegar, tobacco	1.4
Miscellaneous articles of base metal	0.2	Live animals and animal product	1.2
Minerals fuels, oils, distillation products etc.	0.1	Animal and vegetable fats and oils	0.2
Subtotal for top 5 products	9.5	Subtotal for top 5 products	69.4
Top 5 shear in total export to Myanmar	94.6	Top 5 shear in total import to Myanmar	99.7

#### 4.4 Geo-Politics of South Asia

Geopolitics of South Asia is another significant reason for building cooperative relations with Myanmar. If we discuss it more directly, we will find the India factor of Bangladesh's foreign policy. SAARC is the only organization of South Asia for interacting with one another but due to the geo-politics between Pakistan and India, this organization could not function successfully. The diversity of culture, language, and terrain throughout South Asia creates the political landscape of South Asia in which the comparatively small or less powerful state like Bangladesh faces troubles more.

#### 4.5 Balancing Power with India

The reality is that Bangladesh is surrounded by India and for that, it has some troubles or issues with India but being a smaller state to regional power India, Bangladesh has to compromise or face the reality of geo-politics. Bangladesh wants to maintain an amicable relation with India. Ganges water sharing,



Teesta water sharing, border security forces killing Bangladeshi people are still the common contentious issues. Again, trade gap is still huge with India in spite of forming efficient trade agreement and improvement in relations; there are no eternal friends or foes. So building cooperative relations with Myanmar and through this “Look East” policy will bring tough competition against Indian dominance over Bangladesh.

#### **4.6 Engagement with Asean**

SAARC could not achieve the desired results in 18 years. On the other hand, India proposed for South Asian Union in place of SAARC. Analysts of Bangladesh advocate finding alternatives to SAARC. Myanmar’s admittance to the ASEAN has great significance for Bangladesh as it has brought the ASEAN just next door, unfolding new opportunities for Bangladesh. In addition, there is a fruitful opportunity for Bangladesh as Myanmar and Thailand has supported Bangladesh’s move for ASEAN membership, Bangladesh should exploit this situation by establishing close relations with Myanmar. Bangladesh and Myanmar being a member of SAARC and ASEAN respectively can act as bridging partner of two regions and economics. In ASEAN’s past calculations, South Asia including Bangladesh did not feature as a priority area; but the situation may now be changing, as ASEAN currently seems to look westward, while South Asia itself looks eastward. Honorable Foreign Minister Of Bangladesh Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali expressed his regards about ASEAN on the occasion of the 48th Anniversary of the founding of ASEAN on 8th August 2015 at the Royal Thai Embassy in Dhaka, “Bangladesh has always maintained very friendly relations with her close neighbours and the South East Asian Countries. In fact, Bangladesh acts as bridge between South Asia and South East Asia. Bangladesh has established its resident missions in almost all the ASEAN countries”<sup>21</sup>.

### **5. Challenges in Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations**

These challenges can be called hurdles, as these are the problems underlying building cooperative or friendly relations with Myanmar. Both the states feel uncomfortable situations because of these hurdles. Some issues remained unsolved for a long time so that they are not to be forgotten by both Bangladesh and Myanmar. So here, I will analyze the depth of these issues and how they are causing trouble in the bilateral relations.

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21 Retrieved from <http://www.mofa.gov.bd/media/speech-hon%E2%80%99ble-foreign-minister-occasion-48th-anniversary-founding-asean-8th-august-2015-royal>



## 5.1 Rohingya Refugee Issue

The history of Rohingya Refugee crisis is long and many researchers have been done solely on this Crisis. Rohingya Refugee Crisis is the first major crisis in Bangladesh-Myanmar relations erupted in 1978 when Myanmar's military regime drove out about 200,000 people of Muslim minority community, known as Rohingya, living in its Arakan state into Bangladesh. Again, in early 1992, due to crack down on civilians of the state of Arakan, over 265000 Rohingya fled into Bangladesh. Bangladesh is now the home of 32,000 registered Rohingya refugees who are sheltering in two camps in the south-eastern district of Cox's Bazar. According to some statistics, more than 140,000 of the estimated 800,000 to 1,100,000 Rohingya have been forced to seek refuge in displacement camps after the 2012 Rakhine State riots. To escape the systemic persecution in the Myanmar an estimated 100,000 people have since fled the camps. About 3,000 boat people from Myanmar and Bangladesh have been rescued or have swum to shore, while several thousand more are believed to remain trapped with little food or water on the boats in sea. Now the problem is, Myanmar does not approve Rohingya as their citizens and called them Bangladeshi, on the other hand Bangladesh does not accept their statements. Thus Rohingya Refugee Crisis has been the long lasting problem between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

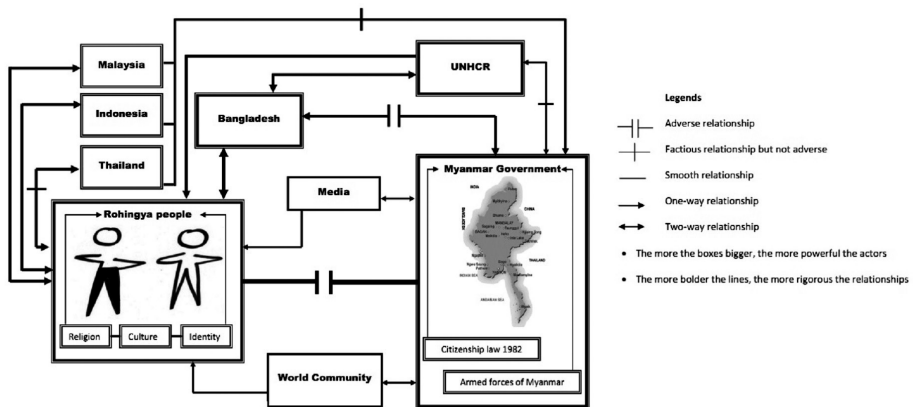


Figure 2: Rohingya Refugee Issue

## 5.2 Communication

Communication system with Myanmar is not good at all. For our economic dimension, the first thing is to develop connectivity between our two countries. At present, besides air connection, there are no road links or passenger shipping links. Historically these links were there, but remain disconnected for decades.

It is imperative that we re-establish road link soon. Bangladesh had reached an understanding to build 25 km road (2 km in Bangladesh) and 23 km in Myanmar. The Myanmar government has at last given permission for our survey team to visit Myanmar and do the needful. This must be taken up early in order to have the connecting road established. 25 km can be done in 2 years if our government is keen. From the Myanmar side at the end of 25 km there is another stretch of 100+ km that needs to be upgraded. We need to encourage donors especially Asian Development Bank to take up this project. We then can establish with Yangon as well as with Kunming in China through Myanmar's internal road network. The Asian Highway controversy is a different issue, as it would simply be senseless for any international traveller to take a roundabout way through North East India to link up with highway inside Myanmar.

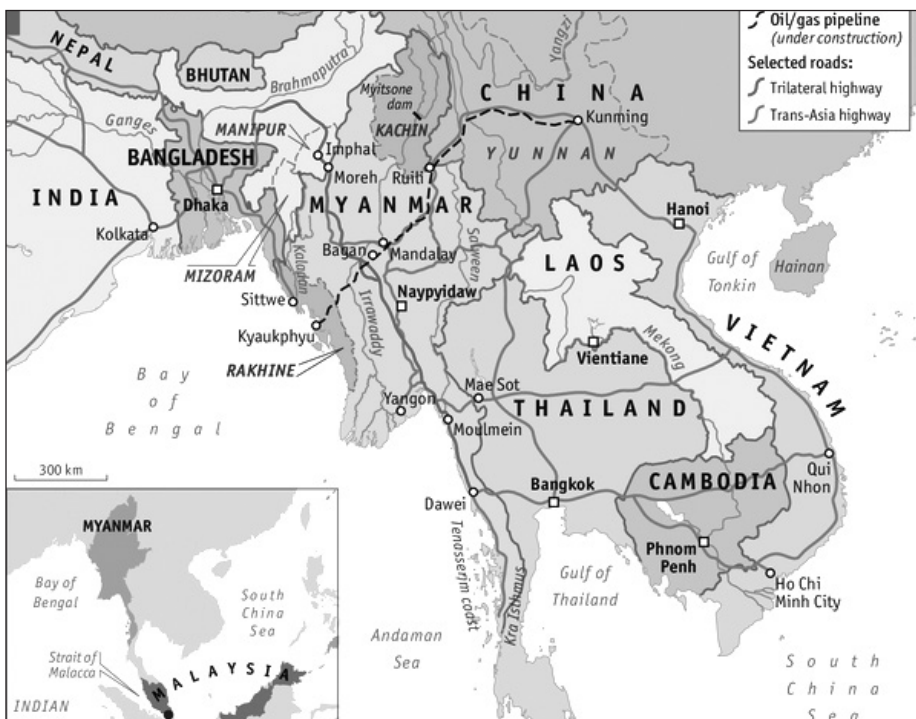


Figure 3: Communication

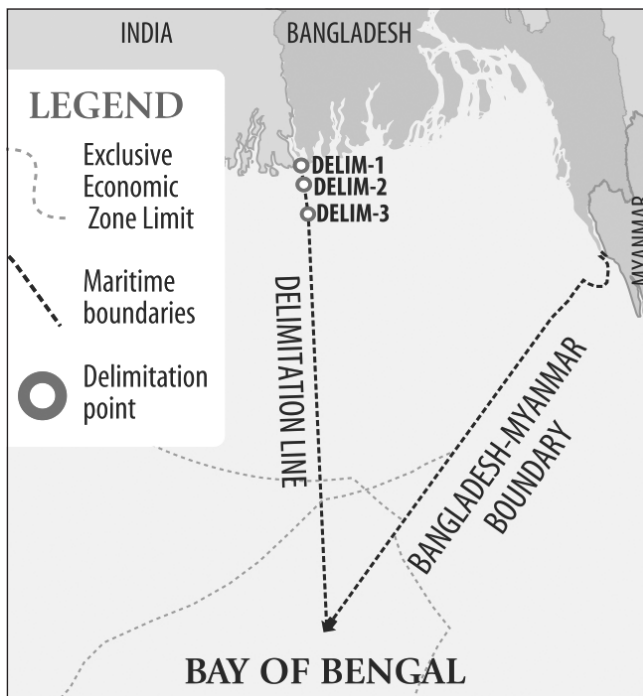
### 5.3 Coastal Shipping

For promotion of trade between the two countries now belonging to a common economic group, BIMSTEC, it is imperative to have direct shipping service used to exist until early 60's between Chittagong and Sittwe. Such shipping

links would not only facilitate transportation of goods but would also boost tourism between the two countries.

## 5.4 Tensions in Border Area

Tensions in border area are another important challenge of building cooperative relations with Myanmar. There are accusations of Bangladesh that Buddhist Rakhine State is smuggling drugs across the border into Bangladesh. “We have rounded up many Rohingyas with ‘Yaba’ in their possession, which means they are being used as yaba carriers,” stated by Major General Aziz Ahmed, director general of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB)<sup>22</sup>. “Yaba” is a drug that contains morphine and amphetamine, and creates intense hallucinogenic effects. The Bangladesh Government’s Department of Narcotics Control has reported a surge of Yaba seizure in recent years—from approximately 4,000 tablets in 2009 to more than 150,000 in 2013 and the 2014. Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment by the UN office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that the yaba seized in Bangladesh originates in Myanmar.



**Figure 4: Tensions of Border Area**

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/bangladesh-myanmar-exchange-fire-along-border/article6069867.ece>

## 6. Possibilities of Bangladesh – Myanmar Relations

Although, there are some contentious issues that are not solved yet and for these the cooperative relations that we desire has not fulfilled as yet. However, some good indicators that encourage cooperative relations with Myanmar.

### 6.1 Special Economic Zones (Sezs)

The second largest economy of the world, China, has a dream of building Special Economic Zones but she could not become successful because of Myanmar's inability to endorse the concept. Lack of expertise resulted in its failure to pass a law that would have helped develop the economy. Recently, the civilian government halted construction of a 4,000 megawatt coal-fired power plant in Dawei and planned a site for the country's first and biggest special economic zone in order to accommodate environmental issues. In addition, Myanmar is working very hard to develop SEZs to attract FDI into the region. Myanmar is also considering Export Processing Zones and sub-trading zones together with SEZs. It is known that incentives to investors are allowed in the form of income tax exemption for 5 years and 50 percent of taxes for the next 5 years<sup>23</sup>. Two SEZs are reportedly at work, one near the commercial capital Yangon and the other in Kyaukphyu, where the China-Myanmar pipeline starts. Additionally construction of a deep-sea port is nearly finished. Alongside the SEZs, Bangladesh can explore cooperation in the fields of solar energy and biogas projects.

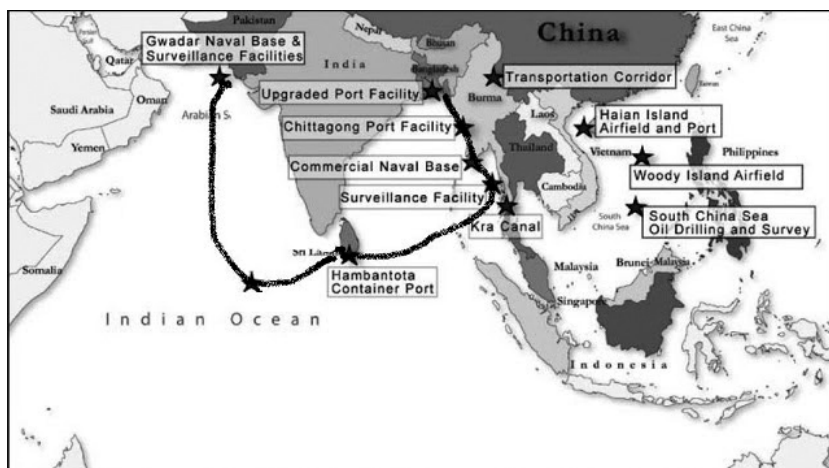


Figure 5: Special Economic Zones (SEZs)

23 Md. Zahir Hossain's "The Future of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations and its impact on Economy".

## 6.2 Contract Farming

Myanmar's liberal policy on leasing out land for agro-based industries is attractive to foreign investors. Contract farming can be initiated immediately in the Myanmar states bordering Bangladesh, though there may be some potential deterrents. Under the contract, Myanmar farmers can offer their land and labor, while Bangladesh entrepreneurs may provide knowledge and necessary supervision, supply of required inputs, furnish a buy-back guarantee ensuring recovery of cost of production and provision of profit for the farmers, which would be mutually, agreed upon.

Having a geographical land area of more than five times of Bangladesh, but yet producing the staple, rice, at lesser quantities than Bangladesh has opted the economy to search for full-scale assistance and the expertise of agriculture from Bangladesh. A recent proposal has been put forward by Myanmar seeking Bangladesh cooperation to expand its agricultural production. This proposal developed because of the new policy adopted by Myanmar to increase rice exports Bangladesh government has agreed to help Myanmar in the agricultural sector, although several rounds of talks would have to be initiated for the cooperation to be realized.

## 6.3 Political Perspective

Political perspective is very important for the greater cooperation with Myanmar. The leaders of both countries control the high authority to make decisions. There are different scenarios of making decisions. Here the concept of history, norms, ideas and beliefs among the countries and leaders are important aspects of understanding one-another. The geo-politics of South East Asian countries is also an important indicator of building relations. Before July 2011 during the 5<sup>th</sup> Joint Bangladesh Myanmar Economic Commission meeting at Nay Pyi Taw, trade Chambers of both the countries agreed that a seminar would be held on Bangladesh Myanmar business development.<sup>24</sup> While the Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh in association with other stakeholders has already started taking such initiatives, it was also agreed that a trade fair would be held in Yangon to display Bangladeshi products.

It is highly relevant that any discussion on the potential of Bangladesh-Myanmar cooperation should take into consideration the outside factors. It is not only Bangladesh who is interested about doing business with Myanmar, Thailand and China already has bilateral business activities with Myanmar. On the other hand, India and Myanmar have agreed to setup several border

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24 Kamrul Islam, "Future of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relationship"

markets and development of border infrastructure<sup>25</sup>. Cooperation regarding agriculture is taking a progressive stand as an agreement is already there for setting up of Advanced Centre for Agricultural Research and Education near Nay Pyi Taw<sup>34</sup>. This collaboration will focus on crops, which are of prime interest to both the countries

Therefore, Bangladesh should sincerely assess the options for strengthening its estranged relationship with Myanmar before others step in to fill the vacuum. There are two possible scenarios: (a) high-engagement with high risks leading to high outcome; or, (b) low-engagement with low risks leading to low outcome. It is suggested that Bangladesh gears up its effort for a third scenario where the government should focus on engaging proactively in moderate risky activities, which would yield at least a satisfactory outcome in the immediate outlook. Such an approach is required to lock-in political commitments and progress in economic cooperation. However, caution should be applied to ensure that Bangladesh does not incur the wrath of giants.

## 6.4 Role of Non-State Actors

The role of non-state actors is also an important part of building bilateral relations. In the modern international system, non-state actors are playing very important role sometimes some non-state actors have more powers to influence decision making. What are the non-state actors in Bangladesh? The powerful trade companies, cultural organizations, environmental organizations can play important role in building good cooperative relation with Myanmar. The most important of the advancements regarding bilateral cooperation in trade, investment and business opportunities came in September, 2011, when a MOU was signed between the BMCCI and RSCCI (Rakhaine State Chamber of Commerce and Industry)<sup>26</sup>. The BMCCI and RMCCI agreed on exploring mutual growth, promotion and development of bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Promotion and coordination of joint collaboration with the provision of law and regulation were also agreed upon. Both the business chambers requested the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to adopt and amend the laws and regulations aimed at enhancing trade and business opportunities between the two neighbors. In view of the slow pace being witnessed at the government level, the BMCCI and RSCCI need to take a leadership role and provide a common platform for their private sector actors to come together in generating ideas, focusing on harnessing the benefits that are to be realized through close bilateral cooperation.

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25 Ibid.

26 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Foreign Office Briefing Notes May-2011, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.



## 7. Research Analysis

It has been already discussed that there are a lot of potentials in the mutual relations of Bangladesh and Myanmar. Therefore, both the countries as developing and democratic in nature, expect to address variant sectors mostly the economic sectors not addressed before. Economic prosperity and regional security are the utmost importance for the both the countries. Keeping friendly relations with states is always preferable for countries like our's. Both the countries have faith on these ideas and beliefs of mutual relations. Although there are some contentions issues between the two countries but these issues are not as acute that could not be solved. Just like the delimitation of maritime boundary has been solved in a proper way. The Rohingya Refugee Crisis is considered the most acute problems of all of them. We know that the current situations of the Rohingya Refugee Crisis, the crisis is not as acute as it was during the year 2012-13. Of course, we understand that these issues would not be solved in a day. The communication problems could be solved in a couple of years. The recent developments and activities make us believe that in a few years there will be strong economic relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Bangladesh took positive steps to solve the problem with Myanmar. When Rohingya Refugees were entering Bangladesh rapidly because of the internal problems in Myanmar, Bangladesh tried to solve the crisis with a friendly manner. This year when flood hit the people of Myanmar, Bangladesh sent rush-aid to the affected people with emergency life-saving medicines and kits, water purification tablets, blankets and tent, among others. Bangladesh made a good impression to Myanmar when BGB rescued two members of Myanmar Army on July this year. Recent agreements and understandings also clear the doubt in building friendly and cooperative relations with Myanmar.

## 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 8.1 Recommendations

Bangladesh-Myanmar relations in bilateral, sub-regional and regional levels are yet to blossom fully. At the policy level, Myanmar has not accorded much importance to develop bilateral relations with Bangladesh as it had done with western countries and with India and SEA countries. However, due to close interactions between the top leaders of the two countries, both the neighbours are now closer to draw new strategy to strengthen their relations. Some of the relevant recommendations are appended below:

- a. Bangladesh should intensify her efforts through diplomatic and other channels to shed whatever differences she has with Myanmar so as to bring the two countries politically closer and make them economically inter-

dependent, entailing natural co-operation between them.

- b. The successive head of the government of Bangladesh should continue to undertake visit to Myanmar to thrash out the differences and explore the whole gamut of bilateral relations. Other Ministerial visits may also follow.
- c. Myanmar's admittance into BIMSTEC is seen as a scope, which will provide a missing link and a valuable land bridge to expand trade and investment between South and South-east Asia. Due to geographical advantage, Bangladesh should take the initiative and play role in building a bridge between the SAARC and the ASEAN.
- d. Government of Bangladesh may enter into consultation with government of Myanmar for import of cattle from Myanmar through established corridors in the Teknaf area, as is done in the northern region of Bangladesh for import from India.
- e. The existing economic relation between the two countries should step beyond trade, towards an extensive form of joint-investment cooperation. The possible areas of cooperation are - fish and timber processing industries, mining limestone, manufacturing clinker and clinker grinding industries etc.
- f. Steps should be taken to expedite the process of repatriation of remaining Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Senior official level meeting should be convened to discuss ways and means of repatriation. Necessary confidence building measures should be taken so that government of Myanmar responds appropriately to integrate the Rohingyas in the Burmese society.
- g. Bangladesh being close neighbor of Myanmar should expand the trade and investments in Myanmar within the framework of BIMSTEC so that link between south and Southeast Asia is established. In this context, Bangladesh should also take the initiative and play vital role in building a bridge between the SAARC and the ASEAN.

## 8.2 Conclusion

Both the states, Bangladesh and Myanmar, are developing in economic status. Both the states give importance on their economic policies. Bangladesh is developing rapidly as it has set Vision 2020 for achieving some goals, most of them are economic such as infrastructure development, institute fiscal and monetary prudence, enhance the business-enabling environment, and expand the industrial base etc. On the other hand, Myanmar remained as a non-democratic state for a long time and for this, it could not catch up the level of other East Asian countries. Now Myanmar is emerging as a democratic



state. After the general elections of Myanmar in November 2015, we strongly hope that it will react as a democratic state in the international arena. These are making us believe that solution of the contention issues and greater economic relations with Myanmar is not so far to achieve. The logic of this paper is happening by the activities and attitudes of both countries. The recent developments in both of the countries are also making us believe to have implemented our foreign policies towards Myanmar. Let us, therefore, in conclusion consider more constructive strategies for our economic relation with Myanmar. Let us re-calibrate and renew our ties based on a win-win situation. Let us upgrade, enhance and re-introduce trade, investment and connectivity between our two countries.

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#### Interviews:

1. Dr. Md Jalaj Uddin Shikdar, interviewd by Abu Mohammad Siddique Alam, April 25, 2016.

# Bilateral Relationship of Indonesia and Bangladesh in the Historical Perspective<sup>1</sup>

*M. Abdul Karim<sup>2</sup>*

## **Abstract**

Indonesia and Bangladesh are two countries with a Moslem majority population. The two countries have developed a close relationship which can be seen from the cooperation existing between the two states. The two states have a long historical relationship because they have some similarities, for example they have some cultural similarities, some linguistic similarities. The contact was intensively in trade.

This paper explains the historical relationship of Indonesia and Bangladesh plaited for a long time. This paper finds that the relationship between Indonesia and Bangladesh now days is the continuity of the long historical relationship; it's not a new one for two countries.

## **A. Preface**

Nowadays, the relationship between Indonesia and Bangladesh has been entering the new era. It's because the relationship existing between the two states is getting closer and closer which can be viewed from some of the bilateral cooperation which is increasing nowadays. The cooperation consists of the aspects from the educational, cultural, or in the trade sector which is increasing from year to year. From the report of ANTARA news, Indonesia itself is the sixth biggest trade partner for Bangladesh.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Prepared for the International Seminar in Dhaka University in 2016 held by Dhaka University, cooperates with Indonesian Embassy of Dhaka.

2 The writer was born in Jessore, Bangladesh, on 1st May 1955. He became the Indonesian Citizen since 1996, and the Professor (Islamic Civilization History) of Islamic State University of Sunan Kalijaga, the lecturer of Post-Graduate School, University of Gadjah Mada (UGM), Indonesian Islamic University (UII) of Yogyakarta, also lecturer at UMS Solo and UNISULA Semarang.

3 One of the contemporary developments of the relationship of the two states is shown from the special meeting between the President of Indonesia, Jokowi, and the Prime

The fact that both are the majority Muslim states of the same members from UN, AAC, NM, IKI, D-8, G77, ARF, and some other cooperation forums of the other developing states, has made Indonesia and Bangladesh have the same perspective regarding some of the regional or international issues which are of their same interest.<sup>4</sup> The harmonic relationship has been built since the era of the Bangladeshi Independence, on March 26<sup>th</sup> in 1971. In this case, Indonesia is one of the first states which gave formal recognition to Bangladesh as an independent nation, namely in February 1972. So, Indonesia has big asset in plaiting closed bilateral relationship with Bangladesh.

It's important to note that the relationship of the two states has a very strong historical root. The relationship between Indonesia/ Malaya area and Bangladesh, actually, is not a new thing. Since some centuries ago, the relationship has been built, mainly in the context of the trade and culture. At the time, the relationship had happened between South Asia region (located in the part of the Hindi Island) and Archipelago (read: Indonesia) in the Southeast. Each region, in the past, was known with Hindi (namely; front Hindi, nowadays are South Asia and Behind Hindi (states in the Southeast Asia). This short paper discusses the relationship in the historical sector from some, aspects. In its turn, this one will be the strong foundation of making harmonic relationship at present and future.

## **B. Similarity of the original culture**

In the beginning, both regions, indeed, had similarities in the aspect of the original culture. The original culture, in fact, filled and was understood solely by the citizens of each region. This shows that the relationship had been begun from the same primordial awareness. The similarities can be seen in some archaic cultural believed by local society, for example animism, dynamism, veteism, and shamanism.

Animism is the doctrine believing that each thing has animus or soul assumed to have influence for human being, such as azimuth, stick, and the like. Dynamism is the belief where each thing has power, such as mountain, stone, and the like. Veteism is the belief that one thing hasmana (unseen power).

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Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, at the agenda of Asian-Africa Conference, on 23th April 2015. Both leaders agreed to support the cooperation on the trade and investment sectors for each of the both states. <http://www.antaranews.com/berita/492461/indonesia-bangladesh-sepakat-dorong-kerja-sama-perdagangan>, accessed on 20th Juni 2016.

4 Taken from from <http://www.kemlu.go.id/dhaka/id/Pages/Bangladesh.aspx>, accessed on 20th Juni 2016

Whereas, shamanism<sup>5</sup> is the doctrine believing that soul can be being someone.<sup>6</sup>

In the context of Indonesia, cultural development happened, at least in five stages; (a) pre-cultural development, (b) cultural development of Hindu, (c) cultural development of Buddha, (d) cultural development of Islam, and (e) after the cultural development of Islam.<sup>7</sup> In this case, in the era of the pre-cultural development, relatively there was no cultural influence coming from outside. Some beliefs above are cultures at this stage developed separately and they just developed in certain places (areas) and it's still believed by the rural society at present.<sup>8</sup>

### C. Writing and language

Besides cultural sector, in the aspect of language and writing system, both regions also have similarities

There are four components in writing; language, system of writing, subject of writing, and content.<sup>9</sup> The writing system developing in Indonesia reflects the intensive contact with the other community. It's, according to Taylor, represented by training and journey done by professional type writer from Archipelago (Indonesia).<sup>10</sup>

Sanskrit language, is believed to have grown and to developed in East India (Bangladesh and around) and is one of the first languages introduced in Indonesia. This one can be seen from the Kawi language (Old Javanese), one of the archaic languages of the Indonesian people, mainly in Java, which has its roots from Sanskrit. System of Pali (Pallawa) writing from Southeast India and Nagari from North India were also the first writing systems used in the Archipelago of Indonesia. These can be viewed from some of the epigraphy found in some areas of Indonesia coming from V-VIII centuries. Those epigraphs used Sanskrit and writing system of Pali (Pallawa).<sup>11</sup>

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5 The activity of the society believes shamanism can be viewed similar to the activity of khajurbhanga (picking korma fruit) in the rural area of Bangladesh, mainly in the area of Jessore and around.

6 M. Abdul Karim, *Islam Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Gramasurya, cet. 3, 2014), p. 136-137

7 *Ibid.*, p. 138

8 Doeliman, *Ethnografi Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Percetakan Stensil "A S.", 1955), pages. 26-35 and M. Abdul Karim, *Bulan Sabit di Gurun Gobi: Sejarah Dinasti Mongol Islam* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2014), p. 50-51.

9 Jean G. Taylor, *Indonesia: People and Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 28-29

10 *Ibid.*, p. 28-29

11 Besides Pali, some in scripts were also written in Nagari script which was the formal written system in Bali before XI century. The oldest epigraphy found in Bali came from the year of 882 using Nagari script. After that, entering XI Century, Kawi language was used.

Beginning from IX century, word form used in Java inscription had shown the modification from Pali (Pallawa) system. This proves that at the time the professional type writer had grown and concentrated. So the young type writer learned from the local type writer and they didn't have to make a journey to India for studying. Since in that century, the Kawi or Old Javanese had been used and had developed continuously until it became the language of Modern Javanese (New Javanese). The word system of ha, na, ca, ra, ka based on the word of Dewanagari, called script, were used to write Wed book and formal documents of the kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

It's important to note, in this case, that of the two regions (Indonesia and Bangladesh) there has been an intensive cultural contact and it shows that the Indonesian people are the open society, since the beginning. In the context of language and writing system, it can be viewed with Pegon writing system which developed after the intensification of the Islamic doctrine. Such as Sanscrit which was the key access to "transfer" philosophy and Hindu doctrines came from east India at that time (which is now known as Bangladesh.) The Arabic writing is also an important aspect of studying Islam in both the regions. As contemporary development, writing system of Latin is finally used by the Indonesian people as a way of accommodating towards the Western influence. Whereas Bangladesh still defends Bangla (part of the Sanscrit) as the formal language of the state and English as the second language.

## **D. Religion Dimension**

The aspect of religion in the two regions also has a strong emotional bond. The relationship was plaited from the beginning of the spread of Hinduism -Buddhism from India (including from Great Bengal) towards the Archipelago (majority of which now belongs to Indonesia.)

PandditJauharlal Nehru noted in his book, *The Glimpses of History* (London: 1949), that when Indian people (from South Asia) came to the Archipelago (Indonesia and its neighboring areas) for the first time the new era, namely: the era of the history of King Azi Caka (Indonesian; Raja Aji Saka), established the Hindu Kingdom in Java Island for the first time. It can be evidenced through an existing cultural heritage, namely; Year of Caka. In the western calendar, Year of Caka begins in 78 AD. Since then, all the kings of Java, including the king of Matharam I and of Majapahit, used the Caka calendar system.

It should be marked that the intimate relationship between South Asia and Indonesia was interlaced especially after exoduses of Buddhism which occurred in the archipelago as a result of inter-religious violence. Interestingly,

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12 Karim, Islam, pages. 140-142

the Hindus-Buddhists lived side by side with tenderness after arriving in the archipelago (Java-Sumatra and surrounding areas.) The reasons behind these being Indonesia's very strategic geographical location paired with the fact that Indonesia has a very conducive climate altogether influenced as well as the accommodated the states philosophy (Pancasila).<sup>13</sup>

For the record, at the time of Emperor Dharma Pal (Pala) (778-810 AD and Deb Pal 810-845 AD) which covers the whole territory of India at that time, except Sind and Punjab, whose capital was located in Cannyochozoo (near Allahabad), interfaith cooperation was interlaced in harmony. At that time, the University of Nalanda (located in eastern India today, approximately between Dinajpur-Rangpur, North Bangladesh-Nepal) was and Kalacan (Kalasan), Prambanan (near Yogyakarta, Indonesia.) were the key educational centers of Buddhism throughout East and Southeast Asia. As proofs, the Kalacan (700 Saka / 778 AD), Borobudur (Buddhist, 823 AD) and Prambanan (Hindu) Temples are existing still today. They are reminiscent of the golden era of inter-religious harmony in Indonesia. The temples were established during the Sailendra Dynasty (Buddhism), when the Emperor of Bengal (at that time) interlaced a good relation with South-East Asia Region.

In 860 AD, King Balaputra Deva (of the kingdom of Sriwijaya in Sumatra) sent ambassadors to the King of Bengal. He aimed at asking permission from the Emperor of Bengal to establish Bihara (monastery)/annexes for pupils and students who were coming from Swarnabhumi (Sumatra) and Swarnadwipa (Java) to study Buddhism at Nalanda University, which is now located in Eastern part of India.

Musa Ansary's research, related to this, claimed similarities between the models of a Buddhist temple at Paharpur, Bangladesh, with Borobudur temple in Central Java, Indonesia. In Bangladesh alone, there are some great representative temples as Theravada Buddhist temple located in Bondorbon (Bandarban Golden Temple) and is the biggest temple in Bangladesh even in the world. Also, the Puthia Temple near Rajshahi region is the biggest Hindu temple in Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup> This reflects the existence of a close religious and cultural contact between Hinduism –Buddhism in that era.

Furthermore, after the changing of political constellation in the Arab world, which was denoted by the spread of Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad and the tribes of Arabia, territories in the region such as; Iranian, Indian Subcontinent, Indonesia, and even China were also impacted by the teachings of Islam in their respective areas. Therefore, the spread of Islam in the Eastern

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13 This phenomenon then becomes one of the biggest contributions in Indonesian nation moral building. Karim, Islam, p. 142-243.

14 <https://e.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/buddha-dhatu>, accessed June 7, 2016.



Region could not be stopped due to the trading activities which were centered in the Indian Ocean.

After Islam spread in Indonesia through the trade activities, it turns out Islam in Indonesia was also well received by the local community. This is a key difference between the spread of Islam in Indonesia with other areas in which Islam was preached. In Indonesia, in fact, Islam spread by way of penetration pacifique (permeation peacefully), away from violence (by sword; conquest).

Demographically, the religion of Islam has a fairly strong and binding historical root between the two regions. For example, beside Silk Road connecting Mecca with the Southeast Asian region via Transoxiana, Singkiyang (now Sinjiyang) and Cantonese (Modern Hong Kong), Islam entered Indonesia through South Asia. History once recorded (based on Journal, Asiatic Society of Pakistan, quoted by Prof. Dr. Abdul Karim) the occurrence of war between Caliph al-Walid I under Governor General Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, who sent his war commander, Muhammad ibn Qasim to Sind and the Punjab region. One of the causes of the Arab-Indian war was a hijacking drama on an eight Muslim merchant vessels which would be presented to Caliph al-Walid I by King Jaziratul Yaquut - the island of Java,<sup>15</sup> which is suspected of the King of Kalingga.

While, the first Islamic dynasty in Indonesia namely Samudera Pasai is the dynasty founded by Merah Silau (Malik as-Salih), originating from East India (Bengal).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the relationship between Bangladesh (located between the Bay of Bengal) with western Indonesia, namely; Aceh has been lasting since the end of the past. Geographically, Aceh is the northernmost of Sumatra Island. It is the most strategic location for trade and shipping route because it functions as a transit port connecting the Gulf of Bengal trade zone region with the western region of the Sumatra Island. The merchants who came to Sumatra and enlivened the Aceh port, brought commodity such as; pottery, iron, steel, cotton, and diamonds and bartered those for incense, camphor, pepper, including porcelain coming from China.<sup>17</sup>

15 Abdul Karim, *Bharatiya Upamahadesh-e- Muslim Shahsan* (Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1972), pp. 2-3.

16 ...the founder of the [Samudra Pasai] dynasty, Merah Silau, was himself a foreign settler. Both *Sējarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* bear out his foreign origin. But from which country did he come? Tomé Pires [Potugis], the author of *Suma Oriental*... suggests that he came from Bengal: S.Q. Fatimi, *Islam Comes to Malaysia* (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute LTD, 1963), hlm. 12 and 23.

17 Gusti Asnan, *Dunia Maritim Pantai Barat Sumatera* [Maritime World, Western Coast of Sumatra] (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2007), p. 55. and Sudirman, "Jaringan Perniagaan dan Islamisasi di Kerajaan Inderapura Abad XVII dan Awal Abad XVIII M", (Yogyakarta: Dissertation, State Islamic University, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2016,

Based on the historical information, it can be concluded that the relations between the two regions (Indonesia and Bangladesh) has existed for a very long time. Starting from when Hinduism-Buddhism first appeared up until the arrival of Islam. Later, the relationship between the two regions brew to be more intimate, namely after the Independence of Bangladesh.

## E. Trade Contact in the Past

Trade activity between two states has been plaited for a long time as well. Due to those activities, the economic relation had been built since a long time in the past. Besides that, the trade contact also opened the large ways of the cultural and religious contact.<sup>18</sup> In the context of religion, the Muslim merchant of Karamondel (Bay of Bengal) were accustomed to enter the Sumatera sea (Indrapura and surrounding areas.) There were about 200 people from Bengal. Such as said by Sir Thomas Arnold, in Bangladesh itself, the Muslim clergy reached their greatest success if it's seen from the quantity.<sup>19</sup> This is not different from Hamka's theory about three stages of the Islamization of the Kingdom of Indrapura, West Sumatera; (1) Islam came to Indonesia brought by Arab and Karamondel merchant, then it arrived to Barus, Central Tapanuli of North Sumatera Province and west beach of the West Sumatera. (2) Islam came through Sufi professionals Muballigh (religious leader). (3). Islam grew rapidly through the ways of trade and politic.<sup>20</sup> The Islamization of the rural citizens by those merchants (from the Bay of Bengal) gave maximum result. So, most of the citizens in the centre of the gold and chili trade embraced Islam.<sup>21</sup>

In this case, of the ways through which Islam came to Indonesia was mainly through harbors such as harbor of Shiraf, Guardar (Persian Gulf), Daibul (near to Karachi, Pakistan), Malabar, Koromondel (Chittagong, the harbor in Bangladesh), the harbors in Malaya peninsula, and then (later) it was connected to Kanton harbor (Hong Kong/China). This was far before the West came to the Archipelago when there were three international trade networks: (1) network through the Bay of Bengal, centered at Koromondel beach. Many historians, including Marrison, Thomas W. Arnold, and the others said that far

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p. 143 and 151.

18 This one is explored by Graaf: that Islam was propagated in south –East Asia by three methods: that is by Muslim traders in the course of peaceful trade, by preachers, and holy men who set out from India and Arabia specifically to convert unbelievers and increase the knowlwdge of the faithful.... H. J. Graaf, *South Asian Islam* "to the eighteen Cencury" with P. M. Holt, at al(ed.) Cambridge History of Islam, Vol.II (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 123.

19 Fatimi, *Islam Come*.,p. 23

20 Hamka, *Sejarah Umat Islam IV* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1981), p. 24

21 Asnan, *Dunia Maritim*, p. 149.

before the XVII century, Koromonde land Malabar were the transformation center of the archipelago (Indonesia's) religiosity, even in the Southeast Asia. The reason given by Morrison was Syafi'i' influence found in the citizen of Koromondeland in most Indonesian people. Whereas, Thomas Arnold said that the beach, Bay of Bengal (Koromondel) was the place to live and to meet for the Muslim merchants coming from Arab, Persia, and India (Malabar). Besides that, based on the analyses from Dobing and Arnold; line of north beach from Indrapura Kingdom (now it includes the region of West Sumatera), protruded to the north until reaching Koromondel Beach/ Bangladesh and around, now it connects to the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

Based on Nurdin Hussin's analysis, in the XVII century, the Benglai (Koromondel) fulfilled the traders derived from port that is in Nusantara.<sup>23</sup> In this case, he filled with some traders derived from some ports of the archipelago, especially from Java and Sumatra. Majority of traders who came from India (Koromondel/Bengal in the XVI-XVII M) were there to sell valuable items such as; Silk, porcelain, and ceramics.<sup>24</sup> As for commodity trade brought in by foreign merchants from the archipelago : gold, lime, pepper, and a few other forest products including honey, wax, tier, sulfur, iron, rattan, cotton, and rice and other foodstuffs were stated.<sup>25</sup>

Relations between the two areas that actually was not released from the trade with Eastern, likes the Indian, back Indian, and coastal southern China. Other than those there are three areas, the trade also connected directly and celebrated by the traders from the Arab world, East of Africa, the Mediterranean even the trade is connected which got to Europe.

In such cases, Fernand Braudel said, the geography strongly supported the establishment of trade between port, island, and cross a continent in Nusantara. It was driven by mutual behavior (reciprocity), share behavior, and behavior exchange (exchange).<sup>26</sup> According to the Lombard reasearch, "Nusantara (Indonesia)" was located in the crossroads between the Indian Ocean and

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22 Thomas W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam, History of Propagation of The Muslim Faith* (London: Constable, 1913), p. 363 and 36, Eleanor Selling, "The Evolution of Trading States in South-East Asia before the 17th Century. "Dissertation". (Columbia University, 1981), hlm.65. This one can be seen in the map of Rahmad Abdullah, Walisongo: Gelora Dakwah dan Jihad Tanah Jawa (1404-1582 M.), (Solo: al-Wafi, 2015), p. 41 and attach 1, rute map Laksamana Cheng Ho.

23 Nurdin Hussin, *Trade and Society in The Straits of Melaka; Dutch Melaka, and English Penang* (Denmark: Nias Press, 2007), p. 4 and 15.

24 Sudirman, "Jaringan Perniagaan, p. 143.

25 Ibid.

26 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and The Mediterranean World in The Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper Colophon Books 1988), p. 36. and Sudirman, "Jaringan", p. 23.

the Pacific Ocean or more particularly , between Bengal and China. To the strategic Nusantara are western eyes, called also Mooi Indie, having a very exotic nature, dense jungle, rhythmic dancers, and rice fields that terraced the lands.<sup>27</sup> Recognition of the beauty of Indonesia and the beautiful brochures attracted West Tourists.<sup>28</sup>

One of the evidence that trade contacts between both regions have been entwined since the past is a unique term in Bangladesh known as Java Cini/Java suger (gulaJawa/gulapasisir). Until recently, the term has been very popular in Bangladesh and the surrounding areas, especially in the countryside. This is because Java is indeed an island with sugar cane as one of its main products. This is presumably due to an intense and harmonious relations that existed in the eras of Kings such as King of Sailendra and Sri Wijaya who established close contacts with the Maharaja of Bengal. Thus, the commodity- namely agricultural ones including sugar were exported from Java to Bengal whenever it was possible.

## F. Conclusion

Some of the analysis brings reflection on the historical data which evidentially shows the basics upon which the bilateral relationship (existing between Indonesia and Bangladesh) today formed. This relationship is a continuation of historical ones which was formed in the past. With similar cultural identities based on shared history, the two regions have indeed formed an intense bond, which truly reflects not only by the trade relations which were formed over the years but also in the in the cultural, linguistic, religious similarities existing between the two regions. All these were clearly not formed only over trading activities but trading truly facilitated the relationship to form. This relationship has been maintained and nurtured until now, especially since after the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. Some engagement in various fields including economic, educational and various other facets are interwoven too.

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27 Based on the West Historian, it's not doubt that Indonesia is the heaven of the world.

28 Denys Lombard, *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya*, Jilid I: *Batas-batas Pebaratan*, terj. Winarsih Partaningrat dkk (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama Forum Jakarta-Paris, 2008), p., 11 and 43.

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