

Promising Relationship between Bangladesh and Russia

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Abstract

This study analysis to what extent Russia supported Bangladesh. Russia is a true friend of Bangladesh. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established between Bangladesh and the Soviet Union on 25 January 1972. Bangladesh has maintained bilateral relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union, with a Russian embassy in Dhaka, and a consulate-general in Chittagong. Bangladesh has an embassy in Moscow, with the two countries enjoying close military, economic and political relations. This relationship is contributing to the development of Asian regional politics, economy, and culture. Bangladesh's relations with Russia are historic. It would have been difficult for Bangladesh to achieve independence without the cooperation of the Soviet Union, and this continues to be recognized today.

Keywords: Promising relationship, Intergovernmental agreement, Cooperation Russia-Bangladesh.

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INTRODUCTION

The relation between Bangladesh-Russia is a historical one. It has a long history. Soviet Union (USSR) stands by the side of Bangladesh during the revolution days in 1971. Russia was taken stand beside Bangladesh during its formation as an independent state; still they have the same motive. It has been proved through different working performance of Russia. During the past days only Russia was not neglected, but not single steps were taken to improve the diplomatic and commercial relation with the East-European countries. Though Russia is our tested friend during our bad days, but the governments, those came to power in previous days after 1975; they did not given proper attention toward this instead of given attention towards the Western World for achieving different types of advantages. The relation with US, China and India increased to a scale, but no such improvement has been occurred with the Russia.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1971, the USSR supported the struggle of the people of Bangladesh for independence and was one of the first nations to recognize the new sovereign state. Of particular importance was the Soviet Union's position in the United Nations Organization during the

discussions of the conflict between India and Pakistan (December 3-21, 1971). Our country vetoed the UN Security Council's resolutions, sponsored by the United States and China, which artificially divided the issues of ceasefire in the Indian subcontinent and political resolution in East Pakistan, thus ignoring real reasons behind the military conflict.

Pakistan troops surrendered on December 16, 1971. On December 22, Bangladesh government returned to Dhaka and started reviving the country and working to secure international recognition of the newly born state. On January 25, 1972, our countries exchanged notes on establishing diplomatic relations. Later, the USSR also assisted Bangladesh in joining the UN.

In 1972-74, the Soviet Union extended its helping hand to Bangladesh in reviving its economy, destroyed during the Liberation War. At that time, the first highest and high-level contacts took place between Russia and Bangladesh. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad visited the USSR where they signed intergovernmental agreements on economic and technical cooperation, trade and trade representation, cultural and scientific cooperation, on providing free

assistance to Bangladesh for restoring navigation in its seaports, as well as on air services between our countries.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman met Leonid I. Brezhnev, Secretary General of the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party, along with USSR Defense Minister Marshall Andrei A. Grechko on March 2, 1972. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman approached the Soviet leadership with the request to assist in minesweeping of the Chittagong port and clearing it of sunk ships and vessels. On March 21, 1972 the Soviet delegation was already in Dhaka to work out the bilateral agreement on the minesweeping and clearing operation in the Bay of Bengal.

The first Soviet minesweeper entered the port of Chittagong on April 26, 1972. The works on minesweeping and raising sunk ships were concluded in 26 months. During the operation, a senior sailor Yuri V. Redkin lost his life as a hero. His grave is situated on the premises of Bangladesh Military Navy Academy. In the 1970s and later, the USSR helped Bangladesh in revitalizing and developing its economy. In particular, the power plants “Ghorasal” and “Siddhirganj”, electrical equipment factory in Chittagong and other objects were built with financial and technical assistance of our country.

On December 29, 1991, Russia was recognized by Bangladesh government as a successor to the USSR. At present, our bilateral cooperation is developing in many spheres. We are working on a number of joint economic projects. Political, cultural and educational cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh is on the rise. Moscow and Dhaka share common stance on the majority of international issues.

POLITICAL CONTACTS

Russia and Bangladesh maintain fruitful contacts on the highest and high levels. Meetings between the heads of foreign ministries of both countries, including in the framework of the UN General Assembly sessions and other international organizations and fora, are regular. In November 2010, Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina participated in the Tiger International Forum in St Petersburg and had a meeting with then Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

During the Moscow visit of Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and State Minister for Science and Technology Yeafesh Osman in May 2010, the intergovernmental agreement on peaceful use of atomic energy was signed. In April 2011 and in November 2012, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Dipu Moni met in Moscow. On July 1, 2013, they held a working meeting in Bandar-Seri-Begawan (Brunei).

On January 14-16, 2013, Sheikh Hasina paid an official visit to Moscow on the invitation of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. This became the first visit at such a high level in the history of the bilateral relations between Russia and Bangladesh in the last 40 years. Vladimir Putin and Sheikh Hasina held extensive negotiations on numerous issues of bilateral and international agenda. Three intergovernmental agreements were signed covering credit cooperation and six memoranda of understanding in different spheres: i.e. nuclear energy, military hardware supplies, agriculture, education, health, culture, justice and counter-terrorism.

While in Moscow, Sheikh Hasina also met Valentina Matvienko, Chairperson of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly, Nikolay Nikiforov, Minister of Telecom and Mass Communications, and Sergey Kirienko, Director General of the Russian State Corporation “Rosatom”.

In June 2015, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov had a fruitful meeting with Bangladeshi State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam in Moscow. On March 21, 2016, Igor Morgulov and Foreign Secretary of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh Md. Shahidul Haque conducted a round of consultations on a wide range of issues. They reviewed the present state and prospects of the whole complex of relations between Russia and Bangladesh as well as topical foreign-policy issues. The sides reaffirmed mutual desire to promote political dialogue, strengthen cooperation in practical spheres, and increase coordination in the global arena for the benefit of maintaining regional security and stability.

On July, 15, 2016, the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev, and the Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina met on the sidelines of the 11th ASEM (“Asia-Europe” Forum) summit in Mongolia.

The two Prime Ministers discussed bilateral relations, trade and economic cooperation, with particular attention to collaboration in atomic energy. They also agreed to strengthen the legal framework of cooperation between our countries. The Heads of the two Governments expressed their satisfaction with the progress of the “Rooppur” Nuclear Power Plant construction, which is the main bilateral project.

On September 22, 2016, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali on the sidelines of the 71st UN General Assembly session in New York. The ministers exchanged views on key issues of bilateral and global agenda. They also signed the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and Government of the People’s Republic of

Bangladesh on Visa-Free Visit for Persons Holding Diplomatic and Service (Official) Passports (entered into force on February 12, 2017).

Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali paid a visit to Russia at the invitation of Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov on April 12-15, 2017. The visit marked the 45th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Russia and Bangladesh. The program included negotiations between the foreign ministers of the two countries, meetings of Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali with Minister of Telecom and Mass Communications of Russia Nikolay Nikiforov, Chairman of the Gazprom Management Committee Alexey Miller and Governor of Leningrad Oblast Alexander Drozdenko. On the sidelines of the visit, Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Telecom and Mass Communications of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Information of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on the cooperation in the field of mass communications and Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation between the ITAR TASS News Agency (TASS) and Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) were signed.

The year 2016 saw further development of inter-parliamentary relations between Russia and Bangladesh. In May, Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad and Chairperson of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) president Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Whip of Jatiya Sangsad Iqbalur Rahim visited St. Petersburg to participate in the 44th Plenary Session of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Chairperson of the Federation Council of the Russian Federal Assembly Valentina Matvienko invited Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury to take part in the Eurasian Women's Forum-2018. On September 17-24, 2016, Bangladesh Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha visited Russia on the invitation of his Russian counterpart Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation Vyacheslav Lebedev.

Inter-party ties between our countries are developing as well. In October 2016, on the invitation of the Bangladeshi side, the United Russia Party delegation visited Dhaka. Sergei Zheleznyak, Deputy Secretary of the General Council of the United Russia Party, headed the delegation at the 20th National Council of the Awami League, the leading political force of Bangladesh. During the visit, it was agreed to enhance inter-party contacts for the cause of strengthening friendship between Russia and Bangladesh.

Moscow and Dhaka are reliable, time-tested partners in promoting principles of multipolar global architecture and fair international economic and financial system. Holding close or similar positions on numerous international and regional issues, Russia and Bangladesh cooperate in the United Nations and other international platforms.

ECONOMIC AND TRADE RELATIONS

Russia-Bangladesh economic and trade relations are based on the intergovernmental Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation and Trade Agreement, dated 1972. On March 1, 2017 the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on the Establishment of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation was signed. The aim of the Commission is to develop broad-based cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh in various spheres. It will facilitate the diversification of bilateral trade, economic, scientific and technical ties between the business communities of the two countries and assist to remove barriers to mutual trade.

In 2016 the bilateral trade volume exceeded 1.4 billion USD. More than 90% of the Bangladeshi import to Russia consists of ready-made garments, seafood, and leather items. Russia exports metal-roll, raw materials for textile industry, machinery equipment, fertilizers, crops, including high quality milling wheat. It is important to note that our bilateral trade is generally balanced – the export from Russia is almost equal to the import from Bangladesh.

Bangladesh faces an energy deficit and is keen to develop energy cooperation with Russia. Hence, energy sector is a focal point of bilateral cooperation between our two countries. Russia and Bangladesh have been cooperating in the energy sector since the 1970s. The power plants in Ghorasal and Siddhirganj constructed with the Soviet assistance still produce around 20% of total electricity in Bangladesh. Nowadays, such Russian energy giants as State Corporation “Rosatom” and “Gazprom EP International” are actively contributing to the realization of the “Universal Electrification-2021” plan of the Government of Bangladesh.

Utilizing smart and safe technologies, “Rosatom” is a proven leader of the international NPP construction market. While constructing the first nuclear power plant in Bangladesh, “Rooppur” Nuclear Power Plant in Pabna, it will help the country to attain energy security by developing its power sector. The project is also aimed at stabilizing electricity prices and reducing Bangladesh's dependence on high cost power generation based on imported fuel.

The intergovernmental agreement on the construction of “Rooppur” NPP was signed in Dhaka in November 2011. On December 25, 2015, the General Contract for the main stage of the “Rooppur” NPP construction was signed. Russia provided an almost 12 billion USD credit to Bangladesh for the construction of “Rooppur” NPP. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the allocation of the Russian state loan for funding the main phase of the “Rooppur” NPP construction was signed in Moscow on July 26, 2016.

The Joint Coordination Committee for the “Rooppur” NPP construction holds meetings on the annual basis under the chairmanship of State Corporation “Rosatom” Director General and Minister for Science and Technology of Bangladesh. “Rooppur” NPP will be equipped with two Russian VVER reactors, each with a minimum capacity of 1,200 MW. The VVER-1200 offered by “Rosatom” is a modern generation 3+ project which meets all post-Fukushima international safety standards and rules.

Apart from building the NPP, the Russian side is implementing a wide-range training program to train qualified personnel for the nuclear industry of Bangladesh. This year 20 Bengali students have been given Russian state scholarships to study at Moscow Engineering and Physics Institute (MEPhI). They get training in NPP management; have regular workshops on full-scale simulators and at real NPPs.

“Gazprom EP International” is the sole specialized enterprise for implementing Gazprom’s projects in the areas of prospecting, exploration and development of hydrocarbons outside the Russian Federation. “Gazprom EP International” currently operates in nearly 20 countries on four continents and participates in almost 40 projects of different scales. The key projects are implemented in Algeria, Vietnam, Bolivia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh and on the North Sea shelf (British, Danish and Dutch sectors).

In November 2014, “Gazprom EP International” fulfilled its obligations under two contracts signed with Bangladesh Oil & Gas Corporation “Petrobangla” in April 2012. Altogether, ten gas wells were drilled. Tests showed that maximum total production of the wells amounted to 5.1 million cubic meters of gas per day which is equal to 16.8% of Petrobangla’s production volume and 7.5% of the total production in the country. In September 2015, “Gazprom EP International” signed two supplementary contracts with BAPEX, BGFL and SGFL to design and build five new wells. One of the contracts has been fulfilled already. Taking into account Bangladesh’s growing energy demand, “Gazprom EP International” is planning to increase cooperation in the field of gas extraction. The Russian company is set to open its

representation office in Bangladesh soon. “Inter RAO-Engineering” has a proven record of rehabilitation of energy facilities. In September 2014, “Inter RAO-Engineering” signed a contract with Bangladesh Power Development Board for the major repair and modernization of the 5th block of “Ghorasal” Power Plant (210 MW). On October 1, 2016, the repair work at the project site began. “Inter RAO-Engineering” is also taking part in the construction of “Rooppur” NPP by creating the first construction base for the future works. As of now, a number of facilities have already been finished. In October 2016, “Inter RAO-Engineering” won a tender to perform an overhaul repairs of Block 1 of “Siddirganj” power station.

Another major sector of our economic cooperation is related to IT and cyber-security. Bangladesh’s burgeoning IT market attracts Russian information and telecom companies. One can mention such well-known brands, as Kaspersky, “Ollo”, RealVU, etc. The major stakeholder of Bangladeshi mobile operator “Banglalink Digital Communications Ltd” is the multinational holding of Russian origin “Vimpelcom”. Kaspersky Lab, a world reputed Russian cyber security solution providing company is extremely popular in Bangladesh and commands an exclusively vast market share in the Bangladesh IT industry. It has become a household name although back in 2008 it was a cyber security software pioneer here. Today Kaspersky Lab provides IT security services across homes, small businesses and enterprises and has a large clientel base.

On April 28, 2016, the GS Group, international investment and industry holding company, launched RealVU – the first direct-to-home (DTH) digital television service in Bangladesh. The project is implemented in partnership with the Bangladeshi multi-sector conglomerate BEXIMCO. The GS Group acts as a supplier and integrator of its in-house hardware and software solutions in accordance with the modern standards of digital television.

Currently, DTH platform RealVU offers more than 100 TV channels in SD and HD quality, including Russia Today TV Channel (RTTV). The digital TV set-top boxes developed by the GS Group correspond to the needs of modern viewers. In particular, users enjoy such functions as PVR (personal video recording) and TimeShift along with an EPG (electronic program guide). The GS Group’s international broadcast projects provide bright examples of Russian high technologies successfully entering the global market. RealVU brings mass accessibility to high-quality digital television service in a country that has 165 million plus population.

Bangladesh Internet Exchange (BIEL) is working in Bangladesh since 2007 under “Ollo”

wireless Internet Brand and has invested more than 100 million USD into Bangladesh economy. “Ollo” is the first and only operator which commercially launched LTE 4G network in Bangladesh, operational in Dhaka, Sylhet, Jessore, Gopalganj, Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Moulvibazar and other cities. BIEL is closely working with A2I PMO program and DNCC committee for providing access to Internet for unconnected population, especially in rural areas in line with governmental Digital Bangladesh program.

In April 2015, the CIS-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CIS-BCCI) was established. One of the goals of the CIS-BCCI is increasing RMG exports to the CIS countries, including Russia, up to 10 billion USD. The CIS-BCCI has taken part in the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum twice. In 2015, the CIS-BCCI signed a cooperation agreement with St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Of particular importance in terms of promoting bilateral business ties between our countries was the visit of H.E. Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, Minister of Finance of Bangladesh, to the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) in June 2016 as a head of representative delegation of local business leaders, including the members of the CIS-BCCI. On the final day of the Forum, “Russia – Bangladesh: An Era of New Opportunities” panel session was held where major issues of economic cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh were discussed.

EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION

Russia regards cooperation with Bangladesh in the field of education as a very important sphere of the bilateral relations since it provides a direct contribution to the development of the country’s human resources. It goes back to the 1970s when Bangladesh was making its first steps as an independent state. Since that time, over five thousand students from Bangladesh have graduated from Russian institutions of higher education. Now they work almost in all spheres, including governmental bodies and private business. The Soviet Russian Alumni Association of Bangladesh unites all those who studied in our country.

Since 1995, the Russian Education and Science Ministry has been providing scholarships for Bangladeshi students. In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation allocated 53 full-paid scholarships, 20 of them - for nuclear science.

Russia and Bangladesh are working to sign a new intergovernmental agreement on mutual recognition and equivalence of educational documents and scientific degrees.

CULTURAL COOPERATION

Cultural cooperation is one of the most actively developing spheres of the Russia-Bangladesh relationship, contributing to better mutual understanding as a non-material basis for the bilateral relations.

The brightest page in the recent history of our cultural cooperation, without any doubt, is related to the Days of Russian culture in Bangladesh and the Days of Bangladeshi culture in Russia. As per the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the sphere of Culture for the years 2013-2015, signed during the visit of Sheikh Hasina to Moscow, the Days of Russian Culture were held in Bangladesh on November 21-26, 2014 (inaugurated by Gregory Ivliev, Deputy Minister for Culture of Russia), and on September 11-17, 2015, the Days of Bangladeshi Culture were held in Russia (inaugurated by Asaduzzaman Noor, Minister for Cultural Affairs of Bangladesh).

The Days of Russian Culture in Bangladesh took place in Dhaka and Chittagong. The Orenburg State Academic Russian Folk Choir, led by its artistic director People’s Artist V.A. Pozdnev, visited Bangladesh. The photo exhibition “Images of Russia” was organized for Dhaka residents. The Bangladeshi audience was fascinated by the performance of the Russian artists while Russian performers were deeply moved by sympathy of the people of Bangladesh.

In September 2015, the reciprocal Days of Bangladeshi Culture in Russia were held in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Bangladeshi artists performed at the Main Stage of the Maly Theatre in Moscow, the most famous and old-aged drama theatre in Russia, as well as in the Central Public Park “Sokolniki”, one of the most favourite and popular recreational sites of Moscow dwellers, and at the V.F. Komissarzhevskaya Theatre in St. Petersburg. The “Beautiful Bangladesh” photography show held both in Moscow and St. Petersburg, acquainted its visitors with the culture, historical figures and the natural beauty of Bangladesh.

Russian artists regularly visit Bangladesh and participate in various cultural programs here, including Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh.

In April, 2014 Russian ensemble “Silver Strings” gave several performances in Dhaka. Two young artists of St. Petersburg Music House Alexei Morozov (flute) and Nikolay Saratovski (piano) performed in Dhaka in May, 2015. On November 10-11, 2015, Nikolay Stranatskiy (trumpet) and Vladislav Fedorov (piano) of the same Music House visited Dhaka with a concert programme.

“Bangla Amar Desh” exhibition of modern Russian artists, twin sisters of Bangladeshi origin,

Rubina and Sabina Khosseyn, was held at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy on February 13-18, 2016. The exhibition was devoted to the second motherland of Rubina and Sabina Khosseyn, who were born in Moscow, but are intimately attached to their Bangladeshi roots since their father is from Bangladesh. The event was inaugurated by Minister for Cultural Affairs of Bangladesh Asaduzzaman Noor.

In January 2017, within the framework of Russia-Bangladesh cultural exchange program, well-known Russian painter Sergei Radiuk visited Bangladesh. As one of the initiators of international organization of artists "Sunny Square" and founder of a painting school by the same name in Moscow, Sergei Radiuk organized a painting exhibition "Ladies Come Flying" at Gallery Cosmos, Dhaka, and held a workshop at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, where he shared his painting techniques with students of Fine Art of the University of Dhaka.

The troupe of the well-known Russian theatre Chekhov Studio performed in Dhaka on February 6-11, 2017. During their Dhaka trip, the actors of Chekhov Studio gave a concert at the Embassy's reception on the occasion of Diplomats' Day, staged plays "The Seagull" and "The Bear" at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and conducted workshops on acting, direction and stage design for Bangladeshi theatre artists and students of theatre departments of various universities.

Ties with Russian Federation

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Bangladesh recognized the Russian Federation as its successor and continued diplomatic relations. Russia now is one of the major suppliers of arms and military equipment to the Bangladesh Defense Forces, including anti-tank missiles and armored vehicles, training fighter jets, and cargo helicopters. Bangladesh has many opportunities to increase trade with Russia, though this has not been able to grow at the desired level because of obstacles in banking channels and some tariff complications.

There is a huge demand in the Russian market for various products made in Bangladesh, including garments. Because of various complications, Bangladesh is forced to export ready-made garments and other products to the Russian market through other countries. In the business interests of both countries, it is important to resolve these issues through bilateral talks and diplomacy.

In the fiscal year 2020-21, Bangladesh exported goods worth US\$665.31 million to Russia and imported goods worth \$466.70 million. In 2012, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Moscow and Dhaka to assist in the development of nuclear power in Bangladesh. In 2013, Russia pledged

to build a 2,400-megawatt nuclear power plant at Rooppur in Bangladesh's Pabna district. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$12.85 billion, 90% of which will be provided by the Russian government.

Construction of the power plant started in 2016 and two units are expected to be completed by 2024, each with a capacity of 1,200 megawatts. The first unit is scheduled to go into production this year and the second unit in 2023.

Since independence in 1971, the mainstay of Bangladesh's foreign policy in the international arena has been "friendship with all, not enmity with anyone." As a non-aligned state, Bangladesh refrained from favoring influential countries during the Cold War. Being a Muslim-majority country, it has strong diplomatic and trade relations with other Muslim countries. After half a century of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Russia, it is hoped that their friendly and strong ties will continue in the future.

The prospects of Bangladesh-Russia cooperation

On January 25, 2022, the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Russian Federation celebrate a remarkable date: on this day 50 years ago, less than a year after the declaration of Bangladesh's independence, our countries established diplomatic relations.

The recognition of Bangladesh by the Soviet Union made direct bilateral political dialogue possible. In March 1972, the founder and the first president of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, paid a visit to Moscow, where he met with Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Nikolai Podgorny, Chairman of the Council of Ministers Alexei Kosygin, and other officials. During the trip, the intergovernmental agreements were concluded on economic and technical cooperation, on providing free assistance for restoring navigation in the seaports of Bangladesh, and on air services, trade, agreements on the USSR trade representation in Bangladesh, as well as on cultural and scientific cooperation. Some of the treaties signed then are still in force.

Upon the request of the Bangladesh government, in April 1972, the Special Expedition 12 of the Soviet Navy was sent to the Bay of Bengal. It was entrusted with the task of clearing the port of Chittagong from mines and sunken ships left there after the Liberation War ended in December 1971. In spite of the extraordinary technical complexity, it was accomplished, enabling the local authorities to promptly ensure the vital supplies of food and other necessary goods to the war-torn country. Unfortunately, it was not without the losses: on July 13, 1973, a senior sailor of

the floating workshop PM-156 of the Kamchatka flotilla, Yury Redkin, was killed in the line of duty. He was buried in Chittagong with military honours in the territory of the Naval Academy.

It is gratifying that after half a century, the Bangladeshi friends continue to cherish the memory of the feat of the Soviet sailors. Such a delicate attitude towards our common history deserves respect. In 1971-1975, the USSR provided Bangladesh with significant economic assistance. In particular, the Soviet specialists participated in the construction of Ghorashal TPP, which still remains one of the largest in the country. On December 29, 1991, Bangladesh recognized the Russian Federation as the successor state of the USSR. A new impetus to the bilateral cooperation was given by the advent of the Awami League government in Dhaka in 2009, headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who followed her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's policy for cooperation with Russia.

In 2010, on the sidelines of the International Tiger Conservation Forum, a meeting was held between Sheikh Hasina and Vladimir Putin, then the chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation. In 2013, the prime minister paid an official visit to Moscow. In 2016, she met Dmitry Medvedev, chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation, during the summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Ulaanbaatar. These contacts outlined key directions of our bilateral cooperation for years ahead.

The heads of our foreign ministries have conducted a number of meetings as well. The recent talks between Sergey Lavrov and Dr AK Abdul Momen, minister of foreign affairs of Bangladesh, were held in July 2021 in Tashkent, on the sidelines of the international conference "Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity, Challenges and Opportunities." The two ministries also have the mechanisms of bilateral consultations on international issues and counterterrorism.

The contacts have been established between our supreme legislative bodies. The participation of Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the 2nd International Forum of "Development of Parliamentarism" in June-July 2019 and the 3rd Eurasian Women's Forum in October 2021 are the most notable recent events in this area. Since November, a parliamentary friendship group on relations with the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation has been functioning in the parliament of Bangladesh.

Our countries share commitment to the fundamental principles of international cooperation set forth in the UN Charter. Proximity and often similarity of the approaches towards the topical issues of global and regional agenda ensure successful coordination of

our efforts within the UN and other multilateral structures. For instance, Bangladesh and Russia are jointly opposing glorification of Nazism, placement of arms in outer space, and use of ICTs for criminal purposes.

The Rosatom State Corporation is significantly contributing to the development of the Bangladeshi energy sector. It is taking part in implementing the largest joint project—construction of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in Pabna, which is financed through the state credit extended by Russia. Last October saw installation of the reactor pressure vessel of the plant's Unit 1. In general, two units with the total capacity of 2,400 megawatt are to be put into operation. The existing experience of cooperation in peaceful use of atomic energy may serve as a basis for further collaboration, if the Bangladeshi side decides to start construction of the second NPP.

The bilateral trade turnover is growing steadily. In 2020, despite the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it reached USD 2.4 billion. Statistical data for the first half of 2021 gives hope that this mark can be exceeded. The supplies of wheat (in 2021, 400,000 tonnes) and fertilisers (180,000 tonnes), metals, machinery and equipment constitute the basis of our exports, while garments, knitwear and seafood are the major items of the Bangladeshi imports.

The Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, established in 2017, streamlined our economic ties. Russian-made military hardware is in service with the Bangladesh Army and the Bangladesh Air Force. Our partners have procured the Yak-130 combat-training aircraft, the Mi-17 and the Mi-171 helicopters, the BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers, the MiG-29 fighter aircrafts and other special equipment.

More than 6,000 citizens of Bangladesh have graduated from Soviet and Russian universities. Now, they are employed in almost all spheres of their country's economic and social life, and hold senior positions in government agencies, private companies and cultural associations. Our bilateral cooperation in education is still valid today, especially due to the ongoing training of qualified personnel for exploitation of the Rooppur NPP. In 2021, Russia provided 70 scholarships under its government quota for Bangladeshi students.

The Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, also known as RUDN University, is a traditional partner of foreign educational organisations. In March 2021, RUDN University and the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) signed a memorandum of understanding aimed at promoting cooperation in humanities and natural and social sciences. The

negotiations between the Tyumen State University and the Institute of Modern Languages of Dhaka University on cooperation in teaching Russian as a foreign language through advanced educational methods have reached the final stage. It is worth mentioning that the Bangladeshi people are showing increasing interest towards learning Russian. For example, around 200 students annually attend the Russian language courses at the Russian House in Dhaka.

Bangladesh and Russia have similar positions on inter-faith dialogue and combating religious extremism, which is manifested in our cooperation under the auspices of the Group of Strategic Vision "Russia-Islamic world."

Cultural exchanges, more than anything else, promote affinity and better mutual understanding between our peoples. Unfortunately, over the last two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has hampered activities in this area. Nevertheless, this work is still underway. On November 4, 2021, the Embassy of Russia in Dhaka hosted a concert of the Moscow Cossack Choir timed to the National Unity Day, as well as the 50th anniversary of independence of Bangladesh and the 100th anniversary of the birth of its founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The People's Republic of Bangladesh is an important partner of Russia in South Asia. Our relations are strong and their potential is immense. All conditions are in place to harness it to the full.

Bangladesh-Russia signs protocol to boost ties

Bangladesh signed a protocol with the Russian Federation on Thursday to promote bilateral relations on trade, economy, science and technology. The protocol was signed at the 2nd meeting of Bangladesh-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation. The meeting was held from 12 to 14 November at the Economic Relations Division (ERD) in Dhaka. ERD Secretary Monowar Ahmed, also co-chair of the commission, led the Bangladesh side while Russian Deputy Agriculture Minister Ilya V Shestakov the Russian delegation. "Russia has been extending its support to Bangladesh since independence. Following the Liberation War, it helped us remove mines and set up heavy industries," Monowar told a joint briefing. "Russia is a friendly nation for us. And there is still an ample scope to advance bilateral cooperation," he added. The protocol was signed after holding a long discussion between the two governments. Both sides discussed potential cooperation in areas of trade and economy, power and energy, atomic energy, civil aviation, fisheries and livestock, smooth banking settlement, geological research, ICT, industry, space and satellite, education and culture.

Bangladesh sought Russian help in exporting local shrimp, medicine, leather apparel, ceramic and plastic goods to Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, ERD officials informed. The Bangladesh government also invited investment from Russia in the 100 economic zones that it is trying to set up across the country as part of wooing local and foreign investments. Besides, it has sought Russian support for modernising Siddhirganj and Gorashal thermal power plants that had also been set up with the help of Russian government. Both sides reached a consensus to quickly implement the construction work of the ongoing Rooppur nuclear power plant within the stipulated timeframe.

They agreed to further advance cooperation between local Petrobangla and Russian state-owned company Gazprom in gas exploration and setting up distribution lines. The Russian government, on the other hand, showed interest in working for the power and energy sector, especially LNG export to Bangladesh, strengthening Petrobangla, and cooperation in the civil aviation industry. Regarding the LNG import proposal, Bangladesh told the Russian delegation that the proposal might be considered in the future, ERD officials said. Ilya V Shestakov told reporters that all the action plans undertaken for the development of Bangladesh will be implemented as scheduled. He also assured that the work of the Rooppur nuke power plant will be completed in line with its deadline. Ilya said Russia as the leading nuclear power technology provider is constructing such a plant in many countries, which will be completed as well on their stipulated timeframe. He invited Bangladeshi students to pursue higher studies on nuclear technology and other scientific fields in Russian institutions.

Is Bangladesh's foreign policy becoming India and Russia-centric?

On 27 March, Bangladesh abstained from voting at the UN General Assembly resolution on Russia's annexation of Crimea. While 100 countries voted in favor of the resolution, 11 opposed it. Bangladesh, alongside 57 others abstained, and eventually worked in Russia's favor. The ambassador of Russian to Bangladesh welcomed Dhaka's abstention and thanked the government for the decision. The ambassador of the US expressed regret that Bangladesh failed to show solidarity with the nations that thought Crimea's decision to join Russia was wrong. Dhaka claims that Bangladesh abstained because the country did not wish to get involved in the new cold war between Russia and the US because it is a strong believer of the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Critics say it is a wrong move and signaled that Dhaka is turning its back on the Western countries, especially the US, that are major development partners

of Bangladesh. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina has maintained cordial and cooperative relations with both India and Russia since taking office in 2009. The prime minister visited New Delhi in January 2010, a move that opened new horizons in the India-Bangladesh relations. During Hasina's 2013 visit to Moscow she inked the largest arms deal the history of Bangladesh a loan for the construction of the country's first nuclear power plant, cost for which is pitted at \$2 billion and which could also be provided by Russia as a loan. During her first term as the prime minister of Bangladesh (1996-2001) her government procured 10 MiG 21 aircraft from Russia. In 2012, the Hasina government posthumously awarded late Admiral Sergei with a medal in recognition to his contribution to quickly clearing mines from Chittagong port in 1972.

In November 2013, in the first round of voting, Bangladesh supported the Russian city of Ekaterinburg, instead of the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) city of Dubai for the venue for World Expo 2020. The vote surprised everyone because it was deemed detrimental for Bangladesh-UAE relations, especially with regard to the labour visa issue. Consequently, many now wonder if Bangladesh's foreign policy has become Indo-Russia centric. Given Hasina's close relations with New Delhi and Moscow, both countries strongly supported her government at a critical time following the non-inclusive and controversial general elections held on 5 January. On 12 January, the Indian prime minister congratulated Hasina on her assuming the office as the prime minister of Bangladesh, and the Russian president followed suit on 14 January.

The Indian and Russian support did not go unnoticed by other countries. Gradually, China, Japan, Australia and other South East Asian nations expressed their eagerness to work with the current government. Even Alan Duncan, the British Minister for International Development, during a visit to Dhaka reportedly stated that the January election was "unusual but legitimate." Furthermore, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands have expressed their interest in constructing the deep sea port at Sonadia in Bangladesh.

The congratulatory messages from India and Russia to the Bangladeshi prime minister, continue to stand in stark contrast to the position of the Western countries, including that of the US and Canada – who have not done so, yet. However, while they have continued to work with the government in areas of trade and aid, occasionally, they urge the incumbent government to hold an inclusive mid-term poll.

On 12 April, the US Ambassador to the country, in a statement issued after a meeting with the Chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP),

the country's main political opposition party, reportedly "underscored the ever more urgent need for the parties to engage in serious dialogue immediately to find an agreed way forward to free and fair elections that are credible in the eyes of the Bangladeshi people". It seems unlikely that the US and European countries will be able to pressurize the government to hold mid-term elections unless the BNP is able to mount street peaceful movement against the Hasina government.

Moscow, as a global power, continues to have a solid foothold in India and does not want South Asian countries to fall into the increasing influence of the US. Although Moscow and Beijing are strategic partners against the US domination, their interests differ in South Asia. While Moscow looks at India's growing influence in South Asia as a positive, China does not. Additionally, Bangladesh is strategically important for the US, China and India given its geographical dynamics with neighboring Myanmar – a country where all their interests collide. Dhaka's policies towards the US and Russia need to be balanced and foreign policy makers may ensure that the country does not overwhelmingly tilt to one power at the expense of the other. It may be recalled that the Bangabandhu's dream was to make Bangladesh "a Switzerland of the East," and policy-makers may not deviate from the ideal cherished by the founder of the nation.

CONCLUSION

In the present world to improve the bilateral relation the importance of economic relation becomes prominent. If we take into consideration deeply the bilateral relation between Russia, India and China with Russia, then it will be observed that the relation of Bangladesh with Russia is very limited compare to them. During the era of globalization and self-dependence different states maintain relation among them keeping their interest in overcoming the limitation of opinion from one region to other region maintaining good relation among them. As a result of that, the volume of trade, investment and cultural relation is being increasing. Through this steps taken for confirmation of security and development. Bangladesh is trying to speak about the economic diplomacy and toward East policy for a long period.

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