

The China-Bangladesh Relations: From Eternity to Modern Era

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Abstract

Though the bilateral relation between China and Bangladesh has been a recent phenomenon in the diplomatic equation of South and South East Asia, the trace of this relation is not new. This started before 2500 years ago though individuals (businessmen, academics, travelers, etc) and statesmen. In 1947, when India got divided into India and Pakistan, China was eager to make relations with Pakistan, the predecessor state of Bangladesh. During the liberation war of Bangladesh, China took the support of Pakistan but could not deny the plea of the self determination of the people of erstwhile East Pakistan. After independence, Bangladesh had neither formal recognition nor diplomatic relations from/with china. But the then Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was reluctant to maintain friendly relations with China. The scenario changed when formal bilateral relations were established in 1975. Since then, the rulers used to maintain good relations with China. These relations were primarily strengthened by the government led by Bangladesh Nationalist Party. But, in the last nine years, the government led by Awami League, a party alleged to maintain good relations with India, has been seen to maintain considerate warm relations with China. Thus a China-Bangladesh relation has been nucleus of the foreign policy of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh, China, Liberation War.

Introduction

Though the two lands of ancient civilizations i.e. Bengal (Now Bangladesh) and China (Now People's Republic of Bangladesh) do not share any common boundary¹, these two lands have been maintaining a

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warm tie of friendship since over 2,500 years. Though it initially stood against our great war of independence. Later on it opposed the recognition of Bangladesh in international arena *inter alia* that of the United Nations. But soon after the Shimla accord, it began to become soft to Bangladesh. Later on, after its formal recognition to Bangladesh in August 10, 1975; it paraphrased their 1000 years old amity. Now Bangladesh and China respectively declare themselves as the trusted and time tested friends in the international community. In the recent times, this line of amity has been seen emerged as the regional strategic important tie.² India, the neighbor of Bangladesh and the regional competitor of China, is not in a comfort zone comprehending the rising volume of China-Bangladesh Friendship.³ As, the Sino- Bengal link is not a recent phenomenon but an eternal reality, the relation is booming day by day. In the brink of 40 years of China-Bangladesh relationship, I have ventured to elucidate the thousand years bilateral relations of the two countries.

China Bangladesh Relations with Pre-Independent Bangladesh

Though the formal relation between People's Republic of China and People's Republic of Bangladesh, as the Westphalian States, was established at 10 October 1975, the actual and traditional relation of friendship between the regions dates back to thousand years. Some sources number it over 2,500 years.⁴ The Sino-Bangla relation was materialized through the Old South Silk Route.⁵ The path was discovered by Zhang Qian, a royal envoy, Fa Xian,⁶ a Buddhist monk, Xuan Zang,⁷

¹ The nearest point is 100 Kilometers over Himalaya; **cited in** Rashid, Harunur; Bangladesh Politics: Realities, Priorities and Challenges; Academic Press and Publishers Library; Dhaka; Second Revised Edition; 2012; P. 227

² Chowdhury, Iftekhar Ahmed; Bangladesh-China: An Emerging Equation in Asian Diplomatic Calculations; ISAS Working Paper; No. 105; March 31, 2010

³ Chinese Puzzle in India-Bangladesh Relations; Anand Kumar; Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses; April 19, 2010, available at <http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/ChinesePuzzleinIndia-BangladeshRelations_akumar_190410>; last accessed on February 15, 2015

⁴ Xing, Qu; Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: Priorities and Challenges and issues of Bangladesh-China Relations: available at <<http://www.mofa.gov.bd/Statement/PRDetails.php?PRid=75> >; last visited at 07.02.15

⁵ Zhang Xianyi; History and Legend of Sino-Bangla Contacts; available at <<http://bd.china-embassy.org/eng/mjlx/gk/t823712.htm> >; last visited at 07.02.15

⁶ Popularly known as Fa Hien in Bangladesh

⁷ Also known as Hue en Shang

another monk, etc.⁸ This route existed after 4th BC to 221 BC and it includes present day's Yunan Province to Myanmar to Chittagong Port. Some believes that the name Chittagong derived its origin from the Chinese word "Xi Da Gang" which means "The Great Port of the West".⁹ Zheng He, a great explorer of China's Ming Dynasty, commanded seven voyages to the Indian Ocean and arrived in Bangla at least twice. From here they conducted business with the Arabs and the west. It is said that some followers of Prophet Muhammada (Pbuh) landed at the Chittagong port before going to China. Thus, this route had played an important role in sawing the Sino-Bangladesh friendship in the later stage.

The next element which bound the two region more firmly is the religion. At that time there is a saying that "Go to the Western Heaven for Buddhist scriptures."¹⁰ Here, the West Heaven indicates the birthplace of Buddha. At that time, there was a lot of Buddha Bihar which was famous for the teaching of the philosophy of Buddha. A lot of Chinese students came to this country to learn the actual Buddhist philosophy. Among them Fa Xian, Xuan Zang and Yi Jing are mention worthy. Yi Jin studied at Nanada Bihar and he compiled a Chinese- Sanskrit Dictionary.¹¹ This indicates the cultural exchange between the two countries. But the more important illustration of cultural exchange was made by Atish Dipankar, the famous monk of the then Vikramshala Monetary who was born in Bikrampur of Munshiganj District. He went to Tibet for preaching Buddhism in 1038 BC and died at Nyethang Temple. But this was not the sole example. Rather this type of culture exchange was frequently made at that time.

The 13th century witness a political change in the Palace of Bengal with the Muslim coming in power. As the Chinese had a good relation with the Arab Muslim Businessmen, the relation was became more intensified. This was accelerated by the dramatic development of naval technology i.e. advanced technology to build larger ships, skillful use of nautical charts and campus.¹² Moreover, in Bengal region, there emerged the ship building and seafaring industries too. The maritime development

⁸ Supra 2

⁹ Bilateral Political Relations, Bangladesh Embassy in China; available in <<http://www.bangladeshembassy.com.cn/>>; last visited at 07.02.15

¹⁰ Supra 2, Para 9

¹¹ Ibid, Para 11

¹² Ibid, Para 15

increased the co-relation between China and Bengal. The two sides exchanged frequent visits of envoyeur. Bengal sent Royal Bengal Tigers, Elephants, Boats made of fern wood and other gifts to China. The name "Bengal" appeared many times in books published in China during that period. The finest description of Bangla was presented by Wang Dayuan, a great traveler who had been to South China Sea and the Indian Ocean with Chinese merchant ships in 1330 and 1337.¹³

The sultan of Sonargoan (of Bengal) Giasuddin Azam Shah (1390-1412) made direct communication with his Chinese homologue Zhu Di of Ming Dynasty¹⁴ (1402 to 1424). They used to exchange frequent envoys among them. Sometime, this number outnumbered even 200. When Giasuddin Azam Shah died, Zhu Di send his royal envoy Hou Xian to offer his letter of condolence to the deceased emperor. But the relation prevailed between them did not fade up. This is evident by the gift of giraffe from East Africa known in China as "Qilin" by the successor of Sonargoan, the son of Giasuddin, Saifuddin Hamza Shah (1412-1414) in 1414.¹⁵ It is to be mentioned that when that giraffe was brought to the palace in China, a picture was drawn by his Minister Shen Du, which was in fact lost. But, a copy of this picture is being exhibited in the National Museum of China as the token of China-Bangladesh friendship over years.

In the same manner, this way the instances of trade and business between the two countries was also evident in the later years. When the British came and conquered this region, the relation waned dramatically. The British East India Company tried to expand their power basing on this region. During the time of two successive Opium Wars,¹⁶ they used this area as the cantonment. Moreover, they used this area as the factory of opium for supplying them to the China.¹⁷ Later on, many Chinese settled in Bangladesh and they ran restaurants, dental clinic and dry cleaning outlets.¹⁸

¹³ Ibid, Para 16

¹⁴ Also Known as Yongle Emperor

¹⁵ Supra 2, Para 19

¹⁶ First Opium War from 1839 to 1842 and the Second Opium War from 1856 to 1860.

¹⁷ Keswick, Maggie & Weatherall, Clara; *The Thistle and the Jade: A Celebration of 175 Years of Jardine Matheson*; Francis Lincoln Publishing; New York; 2008; P. 78

¹⁸ Rashir, Harunur; *International Relations and Bangladesh*; UPL; Dhaka, 1st Print; 2004, p-273

When, the British left the Indian Subcontinent, two state emerged i.e. India and Pakistan. For the religious orientation Bangladesh, the then East Bengal, later on East Pakistan, became the part of the Pakistan. From the very beginning of the emergence of Pakistan, it has been maintaining a very good relations with China. Pakistan is one of the first groups of countries that have recognized People's Republic of China terminating the diplomatic relation with Republic of China i.e. Taiwan. On May 21, 1951, the two countries officially established their diplomatic relations.¹⁹ At the first stage, China considered Pakistan and India as the stooges of Anglo-American Imperialism.²⁰ But later on China understood its importance. Following the long traditional historical background, the Sino-Pak relation was strengthened in the hand of Bengalis. The Chinese Premier Zou Enlai had very good contact with the two Bengali Premier of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Bogra and Hossain Shaheed Swarawardi. The greatest nationalist leader Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, the founder of Awami League, and later on of National Awami Party, maintained a very strong tie with the Communist Party of China. He also visited China several times. The official visit to China was made by the then Premier of Pakistan, Hossain Shaheed Swarawardi in 1957.²¹ Zouenlai visited East Pakistan for several times of which his visit in 1957 is important.²² The then First Minister of East Pakistan Aaur Rahman Khan made an official trip to China in 1957 too. One of the members of this delegation was the then Provincial Minister of Commerce and Industries, later on the pioneer of the war of independence of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.²³ He made his earlier visit to China in 1953.²⁴ The then Central Minister of Commerce and Industries, Abul Mansur Ahmed also tried a lot to increase the trade between the two countries.²⁵ The Sino-Pak relation intensified after the

¹⁹ China Pakistan Relations; China Daily; 14. 11. 2006; available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-11/14/content_732562.htm>; last accessed on 07.02.2015

²⁰ Chakma, Bhumitra; Bangladesh-China Relations: Determinants and Interlinkages; ; Eds. Kalam, Abul "*Bangladesh: Internal Dynamics and External Linkages*"; UPL, Dhaka, 1996; p.p- 261

²¹ Supra 17

²² Supra 16, 281

²³ His visit was cited on his autobiography "Unfinished Memoir"; UPL; 2012,

²⁴ Supra 6; 3rd Para

²⁵ Ahmed, Abul Mansur; Amar DekhaRajnitir 50 Bachar, KhoshrojKitabMahal: Dhaka, 10th Edition (Reprint); 2002 (2010); Ps 333-34

crackdown of Sino-India War of 1962. After the war, China came with a more friendly way. The then President Ayub Khan and the successive military rulers made such a good rapport with the Chinese relation that they opposed the war of liberty and self-determination in 1971.

China's Response during the Liberation War and afterwards

During the Ayub Regime (1958-69) the Sino-Pakistan became very important. After the crackdown of China-India War in 1962, China began to paraphrase its policy towards the Pakistan. Subsequently, it began to provide the military hardware Pakistan Army. Zulfikar Ali Butto who was foreign minister in Ayub Khan's Cabinet helped to facilitate the Sino- American relations.²⁶ During the regime of Yahya Khan. For the reason, China responded in a quite alien manner during the independence of Bangladesh i.e. "Ideology dictates China to support a national liberation war due to its inherent nature of supporting the emancipation movements. But, it supported the tyrant Government."^{27,28} China, along with its new friend United States of America stood against the liberation movement of the soil of Bangladesh. In fact, the opposed our liberation war was seen by them as the threat to intrude the Soviet influence in this region.²⁹ Here it is to be mentioned that U S S R was the potential enemy to both China and USA and the Indo-Sovet Accord of 9 October, 1971 made them more anxious about the region.³⁰ In the United Nation, China stood at the same footings with USA in the matter.³¹ In the December, 71 when the independence war of Bangladesh transformed in the Indo-Pak War, USA requested China several times to attacked India and to help Pakistan from the Ushur River Border.³² But a Bangali Author who was one time an advisor to Yahya Khan, said that "China wanted Pakistan to resolve the matter internally rather than using force."³³

²⁶ Hasan. Muyeedul; Muldhara: '71; UPL; Dhaka; 2nd Edition; 2012; P. 37

²⁷ Chowdhury, GolamWahed; India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Major Powers: Politics of a Divided Subcontinent; Free Press; New York; 1st Publication; 1975; P. 211

²⁸ The response of USSR was just the opposite.

²⁹ Jahan, Rounak; Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues; UPL; Dhaka; New Expanded Edition; 2005; P. 144

³⁰ Supra 18; P. 268

³¹ Supra 1, P. 155-56

³² Ibid; 174

³³ Chowdhury, GolamWahed; The Last Days of United Pakistan; UPL; Dhaka; Road to Bangladesh Series; 1977; P. 144

Indeed as early as in April 1971, Premier Zhou addressed a letter to the Pakistani President General Yahya Khan to resolve the problems in East Pakistan through. Indeed as early as in April 1971, Premier Zhou addressed a letter to the Pakistani President General Yahya Khan to resolve the problems in East Pakistan through ‘consultations.’³⁴ Following this outlook and direct threat of USSR, China refrained from attacking Bangladesh.³⁵ But, after the independence China and its allies became frustrated about its affairs in Bangladesh; especially for the presence of the Indian Army³⁶ and the relation that dated back centuries back faced an interval of about 4 years.

China’s resentment of having his friend’s fracture was not very good. The Chinese chief delegate to the United Nations, Huang Hua, vehemently criticized the Indo-Soviet collaboration as ‘song in duet’.³⁷ Thus the first days after the independence, China was very much tensed to see Bangladesh in his enemy’s side. Sino-Bangladesh relations during this period, is marked by two important features:

1. Bangladesh’s quest for Chinese recognition, which was very important for new states to consolidate her newly achieved independence;
2. China’s refusal to extend refusal to Bangladesh and vetoing on Bangladesh’s membership to the U.N, which was in consonance with Chinese South Asian strategy at that period to help her ally, Pakistan.

In 1972, China vetoed against Bangladesh’s membership to the U.N and the hostility between these two countries were demonstrated one more time. After 1972, Bangladesh took a policy of engagement and eradicating the confrontation with China. Under this policy government take few cooperative steps including; carefully avoiding any criticizing comment against China; appointing a veteran diplomat K.M Kaisar, Pakistan’s former Ambassador to Beijing who had good relations with Chinese Leaders, as an ambassador of Rangoon with the special purpose of making efforts to maintain liaison with Beijing; sending trade

³⁴ *Pakistan Times*, 13 April, 1971.

³⁵ Saliq, Siqqiq; *Witness to Surrender*; UPL; Dhaka; Road to Bangladesh Series; 1977; P. 207

³⁶ Ahmed, Moudud; *Bangladesh: Constitutional Quest for Autonomy 1950-1971*; UPL; Dhaka; 2nd Edition; 1991; P. 251

³⁷ *Peking Review* ; 10 December 1971; Pp. 8-10

delegations and creating an economic link up through informal channels. China also showed positive signs of creating friendly relations and shifting its earlier confrontationist policy. It sent relief for the flood affected people in August, 1974. China also offered to set up a trade mission in the fashion of Consulate to facilitate the communication between the two countries. But Bangladesh refused it. China also invited Bangladesh in Canton Trade Fair.

As a consequence, a tripartite agreement named as Shimla Agreement among Pakistan, Bangladesh and China was held on 28th April 1974.³⁸ After that, China withdrew her opposition to the U.N and Bangladesh became a member of the U.N. China also helped Bangladesh in entering in World Health Organization.

Following one year after the attainment of UN membership, China gave the formal recognition to Bangladesh in 10th October, 1975. A memorandum was signed between the then Foreign Ministers of the two countries, Mr. Chiao Kuan-hua and Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury at 4 October, 1975 to exchange ambassadors.³⁹ The first Bangladeshi Ambassador to China was Mr. A Matin (02 January March 1976 to 07th January 1980). This was the establishment of the age old relations existed between China and Bangladesh for more than 2,500 years. After this diplomatic set up, the two countries never faced any short of crisis for the following 38 years. Moreover, the relations has been more deeply embedded in our foreign policy.

China Bangladesh in the Post Recognition Period

The *Zia Regime* (1977-81) was the dawn of the rejuvenated Sino-Bangla relations. From that moment, this relation never faded in the successive periods. China offered concessionary trade to Bangladesh. Ziaur Rahman visited China twice in 1977⁴⁰ and China expressed outmost interest in building friendly relation with Bangladesh and he was received very warmly and CCP Chairman greeted him at the airport by breaking the diplomatic procedure. The Vice Premier of China deliver a connotation of

³⁸ Rashid ,Harunur; Current Affairs; Academic Press and Publishers; Dhaka; 1st Edition; 2013; P. 101

³⁹ Full text is available at <http://bd.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/zywj/t1053753.htm>; last visited on 10.02.15

⁴⁰ Rashid, Harunur; Bangladesh Politics: Realities, Priorities and Challenges; Academic Press and Publishers Library; Dhaka; Second Revised Edition; 2012; P. 230

eternal amity to him.⁴¹ During his visit various bilateral treaties were signed in economic, military and cultural aspect. As a consequence, bilateral trade volume increased significantly. China also extended a helping hand in reconstructing the infrastructure of Bangladesh. And, Bangladesh also received an extended defence aid from China and between 1975-80 China supplied 78% of Bangladesh's arms import. Soon, Bangladesh-China relations rolled on to the context of China supporting Bangladesh in her dispute with India. China unhesitatingly rendered her support to Bangladesh on Farakka issue in the international community.⁴² Ziaur Rahman also connected China in the Muslim World. He visited China again in 1980 and he made some successful contact with the Chinese authorities in the field of trade, defence and economic co-operations.⁴³ From the very beginning, Bangladesh supported "One China Policy" and considered Taiwan as the province of Mainland China.⁴⁴

During the Period of Hossain Muhammad Ershad (1982-90) this friendly relation developed further. Although there were initial hesitations from the Chinese side, but soon the situation became normal and moved steadily. He visited seven times during his regime among which the first was made within 7 months of his ascending the power.⁴⁵ In 1984, Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang, in his annual major speech described Bangladesh as one of the "five friendly Countries" in Asia.⁴⁶ President Ershad had a record number of six Chinese trip in his entire presidential tenure. Chinese top leaders including President Li Xiannian and Prime Minister Li Peng visited Bangladesh during that time.

Economic cooperation between these two countries also flourished during this period. In 1983 a Joint Economic Commission (JEC) was established between the two countries for better economic co-operation. Under the recommendation of the Commission, A Long Term Trade Agreement (LTTA) was signed between the two countries, which provided Most Favored Nation (MFN) treatment to each other for a five year period. As a result trade volume and economic cooperation increased significantly. Military cooperation also maintained its early

⁴¹ The Bangladesh Observer, January, 1977

⁴² Supra 18; P. 264

⁴³ Supra 39, P. 230

⁴⁴ Ibid; P. 229

⁴⁵ Supra 18, P. 270

⁴⁶ Ibid; P. 267

momentum. China helped Bangladesh to restructure the defense and provided sophisticated arms, tanks, Aircrafts etc. A record number of trips between the defence officials occurred during this era. Bangladesh during that period, received nearly \$ 360 million worth of arms from China during Ershad era.⁴⁷ China also supported Bangladesh to avail the post of President of United Nations General Assembly in 1986.

But, after 1988 the momentum witnessed a change with a major policy Chinese policy shift. China took a policy to establish a friendly relation with India after the visit of Indian Premier to the China in 1988.⁴⁸ As a consequence, strategic partners were given less preference. China also withdrew its earlier stand of supporting Bangladesh in the water sharing issue with India.⁴⁹ To make this phenomenon, the then Chinese Leaders assured Bangladesh that the relaxation of Sino-India hostilities will not affect the Sino-Bangladesh Relations.⁵⁰

The 90s was very important for both world history and local history. Following the end of Cold War, we witnessed the re-establishment of democracy in the soil of Bangladesh. Bangladesh National Party, led by Khaleda Zia came into power. But, Khaleda Zai was determined to carry a very warm bondage with China which her party inherited from his husband Ziaur Rahman. She visited China within some months of ascending power to confirm this reality and the Chinese Premier Li Peng made positive remarks.⁵¹ He further mentioned the Bangladesh-China relation as an important aspect of Chinese policy.

She made an official visit to China again in 1995. During this visit 1995, some strategically important accords were signed. Moreover some other Memorandum of Understandings concerning Chinese assistance in the development of gas and energy resources, and management of water resources.⁵²

Due to adherence to India, China was not optimistic about the continuation of relations with Awami League Government led by Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In September, 1996; Shiekh Hasina made an official tour in China and signed four agreements

⁴⁷ Ibid; P. 271

⁴⁸ Ibid; P. 271

⁴⁹ Ibid; P. 271

⁵⁰ Ibid; P. 272

⁵¹ Ibid; P. 273

⁵² See, <<http://wakeupbd.wordpress.com/2011/02/14/strategic-implications-of-bangladesh-china-relations/>>; last accessed on 10.02.15

for increasing the economic co-operations.⁵³ In 2002, China signed an accord to set up feasibility study on construction of Hydroelectricity Plants over the river of Matamahuri and Sangu. It also agreed to provide experts on flood control, disaster prevention, river management and irrigations.⁵⁴

The Second regime of Khaleda Zia under the umbrella of 4 Party Alliances was marked as the boosting period of Sino-Bangladesh Relations in the post-independence period. For strengthen this time he announced “Look East Policy.”⁵⁵ In January, 2002, Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji visited Bangladesh. Khaleda Zia made her return visit in December 2002.⁵⁶ At this visit, China promised 6th China-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge over Dhaleshwari River. Marking the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relation, 2005 was declared a ‘China- Bangladesh Friendship Year’. During Chinese Premier Wen Jibao’s visit in April 2005, a 14-point Joint Agreement on further strengthening of bilateral relations was signed, along with five agreements and two MoUs⁵⁷. China also offered to assist Bangladesh in water management, nuclear energy, trade and investment, training of security and defence personnel, as well as infrastructural development. Khaleda Zia paid her return visit to China in August, 2005.⁵⁸ In the field of education and research. China increased the number of scholarship. At this time a proposal for connecting Chittagong through Myanmar to Kunming (Yunnan) was revealed. At that time China helped to get membership at ASEAN Regional Forum which intensified the economic prospect of the country. Bangladesh also invited China to take the post of observer of the SAARC. The overall relations between the two countries were great which in fact challenges it’s another neighbor India.⁵⁹ Despite these positive aspects, one incident happens. In 28 February, 2004 Bangladesh approved the opening of a business office in Dhaka.⁶⁰ Bangladesh, from the beginning of the

⁵³ Supra 39; P. 231

⁵⁴ Ibid; P. 232

⁵⁵ Hossain, Akmal; Bangladesh’s New Foreign Policy Direction in Southeast and East Asia: Perspective and Goals; Journal of International Development and Cooperation, Vol.12, No.1, 2005, Pp. 1-14

⁵⁶ Supra 39; P. 231.

⁵⁷ Ibid; P. 232

⁵⁸ Ibid; P. 233

⁵⁹ Sukhuja, Vijay; China-Bangladesh Relations and Potential for Regional Tensions for Regional Tensions; China Brfef Volume: 9, Issue: 15; July 23, 2009; P. 1

⁶⁰ Taipei Times; February 28, 2004

establishment of the diplomatic relation, stressed on “One China Policy.” But this testified was seemed as misname in the policy.⁶¹ That Office was in fact working as the Consulate. Later on Bangladesh following the pressure from China, withdrew the office.

During the Non- Party Caretaker Government led by Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed, the relations remained the same. China managed to reveal the image of Bangladesh in international atmosphere. The Chief Advisor of the Government Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed made a four day trip to the China.⁶² The regular deal of defence co-operation was maintained.⁶³ The trade volume increased than the before.⁶⁴ In November, 2008, there arose a War-War situation in the Bay of Bengal between Bangladesh and Myanmar regarding the ownership of the energy resources.⁶⁵ The then Foreign Minister (Advisor) resorted to China for resolving the problem. He said that “I have explained our peaceful intentions to our Chinese friends and hope that Myanmar stops activities on the disputed waters.”⁶⁶ I have explained our peaceful intentions to our Chinese friends and hope that Myanmar stops activities on the disputed waters.⁶⁷ Later on they went to ITLOS for resolving it and a judgment was given in 16 March, 2012.

It was on such a matrix of bilateral relations, that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, who had assumed office in January 2009, visited China (17-21 March 2010). Bangladesh also considered relations with China as an important tie in terms of connecting a South Asian countries with a global power at the same way as India has been linked to the US for strategic purpose. Indeed, a senior Awami League politician, Obaidul Quader said that he believed that ‘a pro-active and balanced diplomacy’, like that between Washington and New Delhi, could be established by the visit. Given regional and global sensitivities, some sharp Bangladeshi analysts indicated wariness about emphasizing too much upon a positive outcome: “We should be careful enough not to

⁶¹ For details, read full text on <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2004/02/28/2003100417>; last accessed on February 12, 2015

⁶² Daily Star; September 15, 2008

⁶³ Supra 59; P. 3

⁶⁴ Rahman, TarekShmsur& Uddin, Mohammad Jasim; Bangladesh and China: A Review of 35-Years Relations; Journal of International Affairs; Vol. 15, Nos. 1& 2< June & December 2011; P. 55

⁶⁵ Myanmar leased its energy block to a Chinese public energy company

⁶⁶ Reuters, November 5, 2008

⁶⁷ Supra 20; P. 3

advertise more than our gain from the visit”, noted a writer on Bangladesh’s foreign relations.⁶⁸

Through its spokesman, Qin Gang, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced that Beijing ‘highly values’ Hasina’s visit, and hoped that it would ‘contribute to the steady development of Sino-Bangladesh ties’. By describing the ties as ‘steady’, the spokesperson was underscoring the fact that it was a ‘process’ rather than an ‘event’ and a gradual evolution. This point was further illustrated in the Joint Statement issued during the visit which referred to a “Closer Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation”, the term ‘closer’ denoting an incremental advance over the earlier phrase ‘comprehensive partnership of cooperation’. This is an interesting element in China’s diplomatic style.⁶⁹

In line with China’s preference for funding landmark iconic projects, infrastructure received high focus during the visit. The two sides signed four major documents. These were (1) an Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation; (2) Framework Agreement on Providing Preferential Loan; (3) the Protocol on Remitting the Bangladesh Interest-free Loan due in 2008; and (4) the Exchange of Letters on the Construction of the Seventh Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge. They agreed to ‘intensify’ efforts for the start of further infrastructural projects such as the eighth Friendship Bridge (across the Meghna) and the construction by China of the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Centre.⁷⁰

A major concern for environmentalists in India and Bangladesh had been the proposed diversion by China of the waters of the Brahmaputra River, flowing into India, and thereafter into Bangladesh. The river, with an average altitude of 4000 meters, is the highest in the world, and runs 2057 meters in Tibet before entering India. It is now apprehended that China may divert the waters to the parched Yellow river. India should be pleased with the fact that Hasina took the issue up with the Chinese, and both sides “discussed the need for regular exchange of information and consultation on the use of the water resources of river Yarlungzangbu/Brahmaputra to ensure sustainable and mutually beneficial cooperation in this regard”. The two sides also agreed to examine the possibility of the

⁶⁸ Billah, M. Masum; ‘Boosting ties with China’; *New Nation*, March 17, 2010.

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ See; <<http://www.maximsnews.com/news20100318ChinaWenJiabopress11003180101.htm>>; Last Visited on February 12, 2015

setting up of an institutional mechanism for such consultations including all co-riparian countries.⁷¹

Sheikh Hasina visited China again in March 2010 and meet among others the Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, who became the President later. During this visit, Chinese authority signed the latter of construction of 7th China-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge at Kajirtek of Madari Pur. It agreed to start the 8th one, 2nd Meghna Bridge. And China- Bangladesh Exhibition Centre was also signed for the construction.⁷² The Chinese Premier Li Keqiang made a trip to Bangladesh in May, 2013 and expressed firm expectation to further the regionalism and friendship.⁷³ The Chairperson of BNP, Begum Khaleda Zia visited China in October following an invitation from the General Secretary of China Communist Part and made a promise of warmer relation between the two countries.⁷⁴

Though, China is a one party communist country, it has a soft and enduring attitude towards the democratic countries.⁷⁵ Prior to the 10th National Election of Bangladesh held in January 5, 2014 and following boycott of the major Opposition Alliance, Chinese Ambassador Li Jun expressed its concern about the election and demanded the free and participatory poll.⁷⁶ China expressed its concern for the post-election violence.⁷⁷ Many saw this election as the break dawn of China-Bangladesh Relation again as China maintains a good tie with Bangladesh Nationalist Party. But, Chinese Government sent its congratulatory speech from the Chinese President to the Bangladeshi Premier in January 12, 2014.⁷⁸ But it said that a fresh election should be held.⁷⁹ In the June, 2014, Bangladeshi Premier visited China again and returned Bangladesh with some good news. China intends to invest in some labour-oriented industries. Recently, a Chinese construction

⁷¹ See at <<http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=130836>; > Last visited on February 12, 2015

⁷² Supra 39, P. 235

⁷³ See, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/tags/Chinese%20Premier%20Li%20Keqiang> >; last visited on February 12, 2015

⁷⁴ Lieutenant General (Rtd.) Mahabubur Rahman entitled In the SumudroNirapatta: BangladesherPashe China; ProthomAlo; January 18, 2014

⁷⁵ Emadi, Hafizullah; Ideological Basis of Chinese Foreign Policy: A Review; Journal of International Relations; Vol. 2 Issue. 2; July- December, 1994; p. 67-80

⁷⁶ Daily Star, December 20, 2013

⁷⁷ Financial Express, January 11, 2014

⁷⁸ Daily Star, January 13, 2014

⁷⁹ Daily Star, January 12, 2014

company has started working for the construction of the long cherished Padma Bridge.

Conclusion

Though, China-Bangladesh relations emerged out of friendship, but now it is not confined to that traditional view. Now, China-Bangladesh can be explained and advanced from geopolitical and commercial importance. With the flows of time, these have become more important.

Bangladesh lies in such a place which is very important for the geopolitics of South Asia. It is surrounded by India and Bangladesh itself stands as a bar to the direct connection with Eastern Provinces of India. India being China's arch rival in this region, wants to avail this reality. Moreover, Bangladesh possesses a very important port i.e. Chittagong Port in the Bay of Bengal which is of great strategic importance. Resolution of Bangladesh's maritime dispute with Myanmar, China's another trusted friend in this region and China's role in resolving the disputes in the past⁸⁰ indicates the China's interest in the Bay of Bengal. Moreover, China is attempting to construct a deep sea port to avail the commercial expansion of the Yunnan Province. Moreover, it wants to export crude oils from Middle East through Myanmar by pipeline. For the reason, Bangladesh is being considered as a geopolitical ally of China.

On the other hand, Bangladesh is also a big market of China which is one of its major trade destinations. Moreover, India stands as the main competitor of China in the domestic market of Bangladesh. On the other hand India is also confronting the intrusion of Chinese products. This equation is now emerging as the one of the facts for strengthening China Bangladesh relations. This reality creates an opportunity for both these countries to develop a strategic partnership and take the relationship to a new height.⁸¹

China is providing assistance in the field of defence, science and technology, construction and infra-structure, education and research, etc. It is also assisting in the aid, trade and investment.⁸² In the field of

⁸⁰ Supra 77

⁸¹ Mohsin, Amena; Bangladesh-India Relations: Limitations and Options in an Evolving Relationship in Ahmed, Emajuddin and Kalam, Abul (eds); *Bangladesh, South Asia and World*; Academic Publishers; Dhaka; 1992; Pp. 67-68

⁸² Supra 67, Pp. 53-58

defence, China has contributed a lot and still contributing as the biggest single country.⁸³ Bangladesh imports 75% of its military hardware from China.⁸⁴ Moreover, the two sides regularly exchange high level military delegations to review relations, negotiate weapons transfer, etc.⁸⁵ It also facilitates training program to the personnel of Bangladesh Army. In the field of science and technology, China provides some basic supports, especially in the road construction, river management, bridge construction, disaster management, flood control etc.⁸⁶ It has promised to construct a deep sea port in Chittagong as a regional hub.⁸⁷ In the field of trade and investment, China is considering Bangladesh as friend. To reduce to trade imbalance between the two countries, China, in 2010, had offered duty-free access of over 5,000 goods as goodwill gesture.⁸⁸ China is also providing Direct Investment to Bangladesh. Now more than 186 Chinese Companies are registered in Bangladesh.⁸⁹ Bangladesh has requested China to shift its labour-end industries to Bangladesh. Apart from these, China is providing financial aids in the forms of grant, interest free loans, interest subsidized loan and supplier's credit.⁹⁰ China provides loan in favourable repayment conditions and project relevant loans.⁹¹

In the coming future, Bangladesh could work with China in the fields of energy security, terrorism, maritime security, telecommunications, etc.⁹² Moreover, climate change should be an area of mutual cooperation. China shares many rivers with India and some with Bangladesh. In this case, China could help to negotiate with India on river issues. On the other hand, China is gradually shifting towards heavy industries. Then, it

⁸³ Kapila, Subhash; Bangladesh China's Defence Cooperation Agreement's Strategic Implications: An analysis; South Asia Analysis Group; Paper No. 582; January 14, 2003

⁸⁴ Rahman, M Mahbubur; Bangladesh-China Defence Cooperation in the Twenty First Century and Beyond; Bangladesh Defence Journal; No. 24; March 2010; Pp. 11-15

⁸⁵ Narain, Nidhi; Sino-Bangladesh Relations: From Security Council Veto to Manual Defence Cooperation; Peace Initiatives; Vol. 7; No. I-II (January-June); 2001; Pp. 226-229

⁸⁶ Supra 67; P. 57

⁸⁷ Supra 2, P. 7

⁸⁸ Supra 5

⁸⁹ Supra 2

⁹⁰ Supra 67; P. 54

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

would shift some of its labour intensive industries like leather and RMG in Bangladesh. And, in the field of defence, China is showing more generous attitude towards Bangladesh by providing modern military hardwires. Moreover, in the maritime securities and maritime resource investigations, China would be emerged as the true partner.⁹³ Thus, the eternal bondage between Bangladesh and China will be conducive for the both countries. Recent studies shows that China is going to emerge as a super power. As Bangladesh is maintaining a good relations over 2,500 years, it will get the benefit of having such a strong good friend in every respects.

⁹³ Supra 77