

## **PART D**

### **BANGLADESH'S RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN, 1975-1990**

#### **CHAPTER SEVEN**

##### **Catalysts and Convergences of Interest: 1975-1981**

As with Indo-Bangladesh relations, a wide range of pressures has impinged upon Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan, although comparatively little study has been made of the latter. The interaction between Bangladesh and Pakistan has been overshadowed by the political upheavals occurring within each of the two states; Pakistan in particular. Pakistan's long tradition of overwhelming concern for national identity and security, forged largely from decades of rivalry with India, has produced a domestic and foreign policy which strongly reflects that rivalry. The challenge therefore lies in defining characteristics which have been unique to Bangladesh-Pakistan relations and in assessing whether or not other influences, such as those deriving from Bangladesh, have also been able to play a significant role in shaping relations between the two states.

Diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan following Mujib's demise contrasted sharply with much of the remaining political activity occurring in the region at the time. Domestically, each of the three largest South Asian states was experiencing considerable political turmoil, and apart from a new-found warmth emerging between Bangladesh and Pakistan, relations between the various South Asian states were showing little change for the better. In fact, Ziaur Rahman's rise to power in Bangladesh contributed towards a strong down-turn in Bangladesh-India relations, while Indo-Pakistan relations in 1976 were barely reaching the point where official diplomatic links could be restored, despite attempts to 'normalise' relations with the signing of the Simla Agreement in 1972. India's emergence as the first nuclear power in the region in 1974 played an influential part in ensuring that suspicion and distrust would continue to dog Indo-Pakistan relations. The stability being established between Bangladesh and Pakistan therefore represented a notable aberration in South Asian interstate relations, inviting questions as to why it occurred.

The standard approach of most works dealing with Bangladesh-Pakistan relations during this period has tended to be perfunctory, concentrating on domestic, as opposed to broader regional influences on those relations.<sup>1</sup> Little attempt has been made to delve much beyond an acknowledgement that relations between the two states improved during Ziaur Rahman's regime. The period between November 1975 and July 1977, when Ziaur Rahman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto held power in their respective states, has generally received brief attention,<sup>2</sup> while much of the emphasis is often placed upon succeeding events: from July 1977 onwards, particularly during the military regimes of Ziaur Rahman and that of Bhutto's successor, General Zia-ul-Haq. This latter period, when both states came under military rule, is normally targeted as being the most indicative of strengthening relations between the two states, as exemplified by the following comment:

...Ziaur Rahman maintained cordial relations with [the] Bhutto government. However, the change of regime in Pakistan through a military coup (5 July 1977) opened a new chapter of relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh....During Mohammad Ziaul Haq's military regime Pakistan's relations with Bangladesh considerably improved owing to identical objectives of military regimes in both the countries. Bangladesh President Ziaur Rahman provided fullfledged cooperation to Pakistan's military regime of General Ziaul Haq.<sup>3</sup>

...[A] close and cordial relation manifesting itself in several spheres of inter-state activity really started in 1977 when President General Ziaur Rahman visited Pakistan[,...][a]lthough...the process towards normalization of relations between these two countries was initiated with the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan in July 1974.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter examines some of the assumptions encountered regarding Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, including those above.

Because of the lack of animosity and conflict manifested between the two states from 1975 to 1981, comparatively little has been written on Bangladesh-Pakistan relations during that period. Perhaps the view of 'no bad news' often being considered as 'no news at all' has played a subliminal part in

<sup>1</sup> For example, see: S.S. Islam, 'Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations: From Conflict to Cooperation', in E. Ahamed (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: A Small State's Imperative*, Dhaka, 1984, pp. 52-63; C. Baxter, *Bangladesh: A New Nation In An Old Setting*, Boulder, 1984, pp. 101-102; C.P. O'Donnell, *Bangladesh: Biography of a Muslim Nation*, Boulder, 1984, pp. 212, 218; S.N. Kaushik, 'Pakistan's Relations with Bangladesh: An Overview of the Perception of the Leaders of the Two Countries', in S.R. Chakravarty, & V. Narain (eds), *Bangladesh, Volume Three: Global Politics*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 155-169. The chapter by Kaushik contains the most detail, but it is written from a pro-Bangladesh standpoint.

<sup>2</sup> S.N. Kaushik does discuss this period. See S.N. Kaushik, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-163.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> S.S. Islam, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

discouraging closer study. There is little doubt that in contrast to the conduct of Indo-Bangladesh relations during Ziaur Rahman's regime, Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan can be described as harmonious, and yet, as much may be revealed by harmony and cordiality as by conflict and instability. Far from being an unexceptional subject of study, the course of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations during this particular period provides much of relevance in gauging the strength of differing political pressures existing in the South Asian region.

Relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan improved remarkably after August 1975, but whether or not they can be described as entering a 'new chapter' after July 1977 is debatable. What would appear to be most in accordance with the available evidence is that the unprecedented calm which entered Bangladesh-Pakistan relations rested upon the critical event of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination, rather than upon Pakistan's formal recognition of Bangladesh in 1974, or upon Zia-ul-Haq's rise to power in July 1977. While making such a distinction might seem unnecessary, this alternative perspective does have implications in the identification of the most influential reasons for the change in Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan. Defining when relations began to improve helps in understanding why the change occurred.

Relevant to this interpretation is the under-emphasised point that the cordiality which came to Bangladesh-Pakistan relations was an extreme change in those relations. Furthermore, this change was not only an exceptional departure from the prevalent instability of South Asian foreign relations, but it was also counter to the historical lack of harmony in the region. According to Buzan's interpretation of South Asian politics, Indo-Pakistani rivalry has virtually defined relations between the states in the region.<sup>5</sup> He has also pointed out that the establishment of a high level of trust and friendship in the region has been very rare.<sup>6</sup> The improved relationship between Bangladesh and Pakistan appears to comply with that rarity; although the two aspects of Bangladesh-Pakistan cordiality and Indo-Pakistan rivalry are intertwined.

The shift in Indo-Bangladesh relations after August 1975 could not be described as one of sudden reversal, but the change in foreign relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan comes close to fitting such a description. Within four years of gaining independence in a brutal war instigated by the

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<sup>5</sup> B. Buzan (et al.), *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers*, New York, 1986, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

Pakistan government, Bangladesh readily accepted the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two states.<sup>7</sup> Both states were pioneering a link of unprecedented stability in the region, representing a diplomatic reversal which appeared to follow almost on the heels of savage conflict. The change confirmed that the pressures bearing upon both states' foreign policies were not only vast, but also that the source of those pressures had a much broader foundation than one specifically associated with Pakistan-Bangladesh interaction.

The above extracts by Kaushik and Islam interpret the cause of the extreme change in relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh generally in terms of the notion of regime compatibility. While this notion cannot be discounted as influential, examination of events from 1975 shows that a range of pressures, rather than one general, determining principle, have impinged on Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan. Catalytic events occurring in both Bangladesh and Pakistan had considerable influence on relations between the two states. The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1975 was critical for relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan. As mentioned in the above extract by S.S. Islam, some steps towards improving Bangladesh-Pakistan relations had already been made, following the Pakistan prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's decision in February 1974 to give official recognition to Bangladesh. However, that decision had emerged from a compromise between domestic political pragmatism and Bhutto's desire to appease the expectations of the Muslim world.<sup>8</sup> It did not necessarily indicate that a substantial improvement in relations with Bangladesh would occur. Bhutto's public display of reluctance to condone recognition of Bangladesh<sup>9</sup> was symptomatic of the dictates of domestic Pakistani politics and of the long-standing, at times bitter, rivalry which coloured his dealings with Mujib. Bhutto's influential role in creating the political impasse after the 1970 elections, which in turn culminated in the Pakistan government's military assault on the east wing, provided a particularly potent source of friction between the two leaders.<sup>10</sup>

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7 Ambassadors were exchanged between Bangladesh and Pakistan in January 1976. See *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 3 January 1976 and 13 January 1976.

8 For a discussion of Bhutto's reasons for officially recognising Bangladesh, see L. Ziring, 'Pakistan and India: Politics, Personalities, and Foreign Policy', *Asian Survey*, vol. 18, no. 7, 1978, p. 711.

9 Concerning Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh, Bhutto declared: 'I do not say I like this decision. I do not say I want this decision. I do not say I am very happy today'. See *The Times* (London), 23 February 1974.

10 See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 29, 1975, p. 13.

While relations between Bhutto and Mujib lacked empathy and solidarity, Bhutto's link with the Bangladeshi populace was different. His first official visit to post-independence Bangladesh in June 1974 was welcomed in a strong show of mass support,<sup>11</sup> but instead of taking advantage of these sentiments to increase his popularity, Bhutto was unforthcoming and evasive in resolving the divisive issues still marring relations with Bangladesh. These issues included: the sharing of Pakistani assets deemed owing to Bangladesh; and the transfer of hundreds of thousands of Bihari Muslims in Bangladesh who wished to retain their Pakistani nationality and begin a new life in Pakistan. Bhutto's visit was widely considered to have been a diplomatic failure,<sup>12</sup> having a withering effect on the beginnings of popular support which had been emerging in Bangladesh. Pakistan's official recognition of Bangladesh had not yet translated into firm, cordial relations between the two states.

Bhutto's unrestrained elation following Mujib's assassination, manifested in the immediate donation of 50,000 tons of rice and a large amount of clothing to Bangladesh,<sup>13</sup> emphasised the personal discord between the two men. The removal of Mujib and his pro-Indian regime offered Bhutto an ideal opportunity to capitalise politically on India's loss of influence in Bangladesh, but Bhutto's spontaneous offer of rice and clothing to Bangladesh carried a strong overtone of personal satisfaction with the August coup, particularly as beforehand he had been half-hearted in exploiting the growing anti-Indian sentiments in Bangladesh. Bhutto was clearly aware that Mujib's assassination meant the passing of an era and the undermining of the Awami League, developments which could precipitate a reversal of trends in Bangladeshi politics and foreign policy.

Bhutto's reaction to Mujib's assassination was not universal in Pakistan. Some took a more cautious, pragmatic line which they considered to be more appropriate in complying with the state's traditional, India-centric foreign policy stance. These feared that 'too sudden a shift in power [in Bangladesh] might prompt India's ambitious Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to take military action to prevent Bangladesh from slipping out of her grasp'.<sup>14</sup> The existence of these

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11 This was largely due to growing disillusionment with Mujib's policies and his pro-Indian position.

12 Bangladeshi officials declared: 'We are disappointed that a great opportunity has been missed in taking a giant step forward in reconciliation. ... We found a total lack of response to the problems that are basic'. *New York Times*, 30 June 1974.

13 *New York Times* (New York), 2 February 1976.

14 *Newsweek*, 'Death of the Bangabandhu', 25 August 1975, p. 12.

initial qualms had little effect in stemming Bhutto's enthusiastic overtures to Bangladesh, and his sentiments quickly became the official government line:

We knew that whoever had taken over there, it was likely to be better for us than it had been under Mujib....Moreover, the Pakistani people would not have understood any delay. After all, Mujib had been the architect of this country's dismemberment.<sup>15</sup>

Bhutto was the first state leader in the world to recognise the new regime, further underlining his approval of the change of government in Bangladesh.<sup>16</sup> This was a particularly pointed move in view of the fact that Bhutto was the last to accept the validity of Bangladesh's existence and Mujib's right to govern the new state. As indicated by the following extract from the *Pakistan Times*, Bhutto obviously felt some necessity to justify his speedy recognition of Bangladesh, and did so in terms that would mollify those in Pakistan who were apprehensive about India's reaction to Mujib's assassination. Bhutto's justification centred on what he regarded as the necessity to preempt the possibility that Indian intervention in Bangladesh would be undertaken on the plea that 'no Government existed in that country'.<sup>17</sup>

The political upheavals, coups and counter-coups in Bangladesh which followed Mujib's demise enhanced rather than dampened Bhutto's efforts to establish a close link between the two states. In broadly appraising the future of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations following Ziaur Rahman's ascendancy as leader of Bangladesh, Bhutto re-emphasised his satisfaction with the post-Mujib developments in Bangladesh, commenting:

[T]he situation has changed vastly....Our relationship is going to be a very decent, honorable and fair relationship....That is in itself a big achievement in terms of what we have gone through.<sup>18</sup>

Zia's assumption of power acted to reinforce the incipient warmth between Bangladesh and Pakistan. The political relationship between Bhutto and Zia was not burdened by a public history of estrangement. Ziaur Rahman had links with former Pakistani army officers and both leaders were relatively free to make diplomatic overtures to each other without arousing politically damaging accusations of hypocrisy and double-dealing.

15 This comment was made by a Pakistani government official in Islamabad. See *New York Times* (New York), 2 February 1976.

16 *ibid.*

17 *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 12 November 1975.

18 *New York Times*, 2 February 1976.

It would appear that since the character of the relationship between Bhutto and Mujib was of substantial importance in prolonging the antagonism between Bangladesh and Pakistan after 1971, compatibility of individual leaders, rather than of 'regimes' or 'states', was and still is of greater influence, at least in the case of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. The mutual antipathy which had become established between Bhutto and Mujib meant that any diplomatic initiatives to improve ties between the two countries would tend to lack commitment while they remained in power. Personal prejudice therefore had some bearing upon Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, at times even outweighing the dictates of political pragmatism. Furthermore, the considerable influence of powerful individuals, nepotism and personality cults in South Asian politics, as personified by Mujib and Bhutto, virtually dictated that the dispatch of Mujib in August 1975 would result in the eclipse of the Awami League and its policies, and in turn permit Bangladesh and Pakistan to break new ground in foreign relations.

From a more theoretical point of view, relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan were subject partly to the vagaries of highly personalised, unstable political systems which had existed in both states since their independence. The principle of regime compatibility, which is endorsed in the above extracts by Kaushik and Islam, carries an assumption of established political structure, and therefore would seem inappropriate as an explanation for the improved relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan. As a primary cause, the principle does not take into sufficient consideration the subtleties of both states' political traditions of individual influence. Mujib's regime of nationalism, socialism, secularism and democracy hardly could have been more compatible with the principles espoused by Mrs Gandhi's government, yet relations between the two states gradually deteriorated, the cause being popular dissatisfaction, rather than state-to-state disenchantment. Ziaur Rahman's and Bhutto's regimes were not obviously compatible, especially since the latter had a civilian, democratic beginning, yet considerable strengthening of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations took place once both were leaders of their states. The change in relations had already begun, well before Zia-ul-Haq assumed control of Pakistan.

It is not difficult to illustrate that the two Zias had characteristics in common: a military background and a strategy of loading their political policies

with religious sentiments;<sup>19</sup> 'domesticating' pan-Islamic ideals for the purposes of political consolidation and advantage.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, it is also easy to presume that this appearance of political compatibility was largely responsible for bringing the two states together.

If a comparison is made of the character of Ziaur Rahman's and Zia-ul-Haq's regimes, then the evidence for similarity becomes less clear-cut, undermining the notion of regime compatibility even further. Such a study has been made by Tushar Barua who has argued that although both Pakistan and Bangladesh succumbed to military rule, 'neither the structural and cultural affinity nor divergence' between the two states 'can explain the actual political systems in them'.<sup>21</sup> His main argument has focused on the personalised political structures in both states, where inter-elite relationships of cohesion and conflict aimed at sustaining power and privileges have been of greater influence in moulding both political systems.<sup>22</sup> Barua has also pointed out that although a military regime emerged in both states, the installation of military rule resulted from a variety of political, cultural, economic and administrative stimuli. Making an accurate comparison between the two regimes therefore becomes more difficult. Studying and comparing the particular goals of powerful individuals and factions in Pakistan and Bangladesh, as opposed to a general comparison between the types of regimes existing in each state, would perhaps provide a more useful method of interpretation. Even if the principle of regime compatibility could stand as an influential foreign policy determinant, it does not alter the fact that the sudden change to cordiality between Bangladesh and Pakistan occurred before Zia-ul-Haq came to power in Pakistan.<sup>23</sup>

Barua's observations point towards a more comprehensive interpretation, one which can be extended further by questioning the extent to which private, individual political motives can be translated into public policies.

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19 For an interpretation of Zia ul-Haq's efforts to use religion in consolidating power see: O. Noman, *Pakistan: A Political and Economic History Since 1947* (second ed.), London, 1990, pp. 144-154.

20 Camilleri and Teichmann make the point that states 'domesticate religion and morality' in order to 'use them in the service of state values and policies'. J. Camilleri, & M. Teichmann, *Security and Survival: The New Era In International Relations*, South Yarra, 1973, p. 15. In the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh, individual leaders, rather than 'the state', have used this technique to secure power.

21 Tushar K. Barua 'Military Regime in Pakistan and Bangladesh: A Contrast in Political Processes' in M.M. Khan, & J.P. Thorp (eds), *Bangladesh: Society, Politics and Bureaucracy*, Dhaka, 1984, p. 75.

22 *ibid.*

23 Further evidence for this will be provided in the chapter.

In assessing Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan, it is pertinent to question the extent to which the recurring definition of foreign policy can be applied; that it is a manifestation of a government's desire to ensure state security and the 'protection and preservation of the minimum core values of any nation: political independence and territorial integrity.'<sup>24</sup> Examining the specific conduct of leaders such as Bhutto, Mujib and Ziaur Rahman indicates that such a definition is merely the ideal of what foreign policy should be and that personal self-interest plays a greater role in foreign-policy decision-making than is usually indicated in the secondary sources. It may be more appropriate, for example, to explain the strong shift to cordial relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan in terms of the particular accordance between Ziaur Rahman's strategies to establish and hold on to power and Bhutto's ebullient overtures of friendship towards Bangladesh following Mujib's assassination. Considerable power has been held by individuals or small coterie in both states, a tendency which seems to indicate that the states' foreign policies have been determined by individual needs as much as anything else.

Scholars such as K.J. Holsti have evaluated this notion, Holsti concluding that in general, any explanation of a state's objectives in terms of the leader's 'images, values, ideological commitments, or private motives' is inadequate.<sup>25</sup> He has also stated that because 'policy, often undramatic, is the result of consultation, compromise, and bargaining among many individuals and advisers, the impact of subconscious psychological needs will be almost impossible to measure, identify, and may not help explain decisions in any case.'<sup>26</sup> Christopher Hill has added to the debate, declaring that a state's particular foreign policy is not simply a manifestation of the leadership's desire to stay in power,<sup>27</sup> because this impetus is common to most, if not all, ruling elites, and therefore becomes too general to be meaningful.<sup>28</sup>

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24 T. Maniruzzaman, *The Security of Small States in the Third World*, Canberra, ANU., 1982, p. 15. E. Ahamed also writes that the most important objective of foreign policy is the maintenance of the state's 'sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity.' E. Ahamed (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

25 K.J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (second ed.), Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1972, p. 371.

26 *ibid.*

27 C. Hill, 'Theories of Foreign Policy Making for the Developing Countries', in C. Clapham (ed.), *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States*, Westmead, 1977, p. 7. Robert Good put forward the idea that foreign policy has often served to keep an 'in-group' in power. *ibid.*

28 *ibid.*

While these arguments are applicable on a very broad scale, Barua's observations, which are based on particular circumstances occurring in Bangladesh and Pakistan, contain a slightly contrasting message, one which has given greater prominence to the actions of individuals and factions. Furthermore, both Holsti and Hill have qualified their arguments, taking them in a similar direction to that of Barua. Holsti has emphasised that the type of leadership existing in a state does have a considerable impact on the foreign policy decision-making which eventuates. He has pointed out that in an authoritarian political system, decision-making is sometimes limited to a few high-ranking individuals who are 'often cut off from objective analyses of internal and external conditions'.<sup>29</sup> These conditions, according to Holsti, mean that there are 'strong imperatives to undertake high-risk policies, or to command sudden switches in objectives, roles, orientations, or actions.'<sup>30</sup> Holsti has added that in regimes headed by charismatic leaders, (as Bhutto, Mujib and Ziaur Rahman are often described) those leaders can achieve 'considerable personal gratification from exercising power arbitrarily, seeking international prestige, or glorifying themselves through military displays and expeditions abroad.'<sup>31</sup> As shown above, and below, some of these stimuli and their ramifications (such as the sudden shift to warm relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh) are applicable to the conduct of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations.

Hill's added argument that 'all types of polity are prone to rule by dominant minorities'<sup>32</sup> may be valid, but it also suggests that foreign policy can be considerably dependent upon the fluctuating concerns of dominant individuals and groups. This perspective has also been supported by Christopher Clapham who has considered that foreign policy can be especially personalised in the absence of an 'effective range of domestic institutions' through which the leadership can work,<sup>33</sup> a condition which applied to both Pakistan and Bangladesh during the period under study.

In appraising the two states' foreign relations, the perspectives of Barua, as well as Holsti, Hill and Clapham, support to some degree the necessity to take into account the particular motives and circumstances associated with the

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29 K.J. Holsti, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

30 *ibid.*

31 *ibid.*, p. 380.

32 C. Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

33 C. Clapham, 'Conclusion: Comparative Foreign Policy and Developing States', in C. Clapham (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 169.

leadership existing in Bangladesh and Pakistan between 1975 and 1990. An appraisal of the relationship between Bhutto and Mujib, therefore, should provide some insight into relations between the two states, as long as it also includes an examination of possible underlying reasons considered to have played a part in moulding the individual concerns and actions. Awareness of the type of regime occurring in both states can provide a very general basis for understanding their foreign relations, but this study attempts to take more into account, not only through examining the particular circumstances and motives involved, but also by looking at the underlying, long-term influences upon relations between the two states.

A comparison of the evidence for warmer Bangladesh-Pakistan relations during Bhutto's regime and during that of Zia-ul-Haq is warranted to try to ascertain the substance behind the rhetoric expounded. If the installation of a military regime in Pakistan was largely responsible for strengthening relations with Bangladesh, then an obvious increase in warmth and cordiality in those relations should have been evident upon Zia-ul-Haq's rise to leadership of Pakistan.

The most significant step taken towards improved relations during the regimes of Bhutto and Ziaur Rahman was the establishment of diplomatic links in January 1976, as discussed above. It was this breakthrough which allowed further agreements, particularly economic, to be reached in the following months. For example, on 30 April 1976, both governments signed a general agreement which laid down the framework for the resumption of full-scale trade between the two countries.<sup>34</sup> A memorandum of understanding was signed to cover shipping arrangements to facilitate the trade, while a meeting to finalise banking arrangements to cover trade transactions was also organised.<sup>35</sup> The trade agreement was described by the leader of the Bangladesh trade delegation as providing 'an overall framework and official umbrella for the resumption of the trade ties' and representing 'the first official contact of its kind after Bangladesh was established'.<sup>36</sup> An achievement such as this tends to be overlooked by those scholars who link the cordiality of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations with the period of Zia-ul-Haq's regime, as exemplified by the following incorrect comment by S.S. Islam who stated that '[i]n the early phase of

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<sup>34</sup> *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 1 May 1976.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* A memorandum of 'understanding banking arrangements' was signed the following day, on 1 May 1976.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 3 May 1976.

independence of Bangladesh no trade agreement...was signed between the two countries. They have been maintaining trade relations since President Zia's visit to Pakistan in 1977.<sup>37</sup>

In the political arena, Bhutto offered firm support to Bangladesh, although there were considerable advantages for doing so, arising particularly from the latter's altercations with the Indian government. For example, in sympathising with Bangladesh in the Farakka debate conducted during the seventh Islamic conference of Foreign Ministers at Istanbul,<sup>38</sup> Bhutto's government could not only portray itself as acting clearly in the interests of Islamic unity, but it could also draw international attention towards Indian activities in the subcontinent. Bhutto was able to cultivate Pakistan's increasingly important Islamic ties, and at the same time, gain wider support in keeping Indian regional ambitions in check. Offering support to Bangladesh was an integral part of Bhutto's broader plans to win the support of wealthy and influential Muslim states (such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait), a strategy which has been described as resulting from Bhutto's recognition that Pakistan had 'nowhere else to go given decreasing American interest'.<sup>39</sup> Bhutto's efforts to elevate his authoritarian and centralised regime by increasingly espousing Islamic sentiments<sup>40</sup> resembled Ziaur Rahman's own attempts to implement an Islamic style of government, providing an additional stimulus for rapprochement between the two states.

The evidence for a 'new chapter' emerging in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations once Zia-ul-Haq had ousted Bhutto in July 1977 is far from conclusive. Zia-ul-Haq's ascendancy in Pakistan was followed by effusive rhetorical reassurances from both states that their relations would continue to strengthen, due to the 'identity' of their views on international and regional issues, and thereby 'contribute to the stability of South Asia and to Islamic solidarity'.<sup>41</sup> Ziaur Rahman's visit to Pakistan in December 1977 was accompanied by similar

37 S.S. Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

38 *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 16 May 1976.

39 L. Ziring, *op. cit.*, p. 726.

40 In May 1976, for example, Bhutto emphasised the primacy of Islam and its supremacy over political and economic ideology, declaring that 'while our religion, detached from alien accretions and the workings of obscurantism, sanctions, absorbs and encompasses our economic ideology and political philosophy, a political system and economic methodology cannot even pretend to embrace the full range and scope of a religion like Islam. *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 15 May 1976.

41 *Bangladesh Observer*, 31 August 1977.

assurances of cooperation and collaboration between the two states.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, despite such promising sentiments, the agreements reached between the two states did not go much beyond what had already been initiated, and those which went so far as to address unresolved legacies of the 1971 war achieved little of substance. As during Bhutto's regime, agreements concerning improved trading arrangements were made between the two states, in December 1977,<sup>43</sup> July 1979,<sup>44</sup> and July 1980.<sup>45</sup> Another shipping accord was signed in August 1978,<sup>46</sup> and an aviation accord was signed in January 1979 to facilitate the movement of people and the exchange of goods between Bangladesh and Pakistan.<sup>47</sup>

Agreements which would have represented a more substantial example of improved cordiality were those which might have addressed the two still unresolved problems associated with the independence war, issues which had proved particularly intractable because they were logistically difficult to implement and would require the Pakistan government to incur a financial burden to the benefit of Bangladesh. Those problems were the repatriation of Biharis, numbering approximately 130,000 in 1977,<sup>48</sup> who as yet had not been able to fulfil their desire to relocate from Bangladesh to Pakistan; and the sharing of Pakistani assets which the Bangladesh government deemed should have taken place following Bangladesh's attainment of independence.<sup>49</sup>

The issues of Bihari repatriation and the division of assets had been virtually shelved once most of the other more pressing post-war differences had been resolved,<sup>50</sup> yet despite the obvious futility of extracting these concessions from the Pakistan government, successive Bangladesh governments continued to appeal to Pakistan to comply. For example, Ziaur Rahman had discussed the Bihari issue during his visit to Islamabad in December 1977, and although the Pakistan government had reportedly agreed

42 *ibid.*, 23 December 1977.

43 *Asian Recorder*, January 8-14, 1978, p. 14109.

44 A Joint Economic Commission between Pakistan and Bangladesh was established in July 1979. *ibid.*, September 3-9, 1979, pp. 15065-6.

45 *Bangladesh Observer*, 12 July 1980.

46 *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 3 August 1978.

47 S.N. Kaushik, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

48 C.P. O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

49 For details of the amounts requested, totalling approximately Tk. 257 crore, see S.S. Islam, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-9.

50 D.A. Wright, *Bangladesh: Origins and Indian Ocean Relations (1971-1975)*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 186-7, 193-4.

to accept 25,000 more, little of substance actually came of the offer.<sup>51</sup> Optimistic reports concerning Bihari repatriation were still being presented in the Bangladesh press twelve months later. During a visit to Pakistan in December 1978, Bangladesh's foreign minister Professor Shamsul Haq commented confidently that 'both sides stressed the need for immediate start of the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis and agreed that the efforts should be made to remove the financial impediments affecting the process.'<sup>52</sup> By October 1980, at a meeting of foreign secretaries of Bangladesh and Pakistan, the earlier Pakistani offers of Bihari repatriation were shown to be meaningless, as indicated by the following reply by the Pakistan foreign secretary, Mr Reaz Piracha, to a question concerning repatriation:

Since we have no dispute there was no question of agreement to be reached in this meeting.... We have no divisive issues between the two countries.<sup>53</sup>

Later during the meeting Piracha acknowledged the 'human side of the problem of the three lakh stranded Pakistanis', clearly regarding the Biharis to be Pakistani citizens. Nevertheless, he justified Pakistan's back-peddling on the issue by stating that 'this was not the only human problem and there were other such problems elsewhere and those also could not be solved.'<sup>54</sup>

A similar pattern of appeal and procrastination applied to the division of assets, although at the foreign secretaries meeting in October 1980, a decision was reached to set up an 'expert level joint working group' to discuss the 'sharing of assets and liabilities between the two countries'.<sup>55</sup> Notwithstanding, no substantial progress was made by the joint body.<sup>56</sup>

The above study of some of the evidence for increasing cordiality in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations shows that while warmth had become characteristic of those relations, it did not appear to increase markedly beyond what was achieved during Bhutto's regime and certainly did not extend to the point of resolving the more politically contentious issues which had marred their relations since 1971. At the same time, this conclusion does not deny that

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51 C.P. O'Donnell, *op. cit.*, p. 218. Ziaur Rahman had commented that the repatriation of 'non locals' would start 'very soon'. *Bangladesh Observer*, 24 December 1977.

52 *Bangladesh Observer*, 23 December 1978.

53 *ibid.*, 26 October 1980.

54 *ibid.*, 27 October 1980.

55 *ibid.*

56 *The Bangladesh Times*, 11 August 1983, cited in S.S. Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

a genuine, distinct shift in Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan did occur, but it confirms that the shift should be regarded as commencing after Mujib's assassination, rather than after the 1977 coup in Pakistan. Furthermore, while the solidarity achieved between the two states after 1975 appeared to be limited, the change to relative cordiality was nevertheless an extraordinary one, when taking into account the animosity and coolness which had been the most typical characteristics of official Bangladesh-Pakistan relations before that time. Even if little progress had been made in the assets-sharing issue, for example, the fact that representatives of both states had actually met to discuss the issue and could describe their talks as 'fruitful', being conducted in a 'spirit of frankness and understanding',<sup>57</sup> was an achievement easily underestimated in the light of traditional South Asian regional rivalry. The obvious procrastination by the Pakistan government over the Bihari problem also escaped noticeable criticism in the Bangladesh press. The improvement in relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan in 1975 was one of sharp contrast and appeared comparatively resilient.

A study of the timing of improved relations between the two states confirms that Mujib's assassination was an event of particular significance. The event needs to be taken into account when attempting to bring out the interconnections between individual political aspirations (deemed relevant in the discussion above) and some of the broader influences which may have contributed to the reshaping of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations.

Mujib's assassination had fundamental ideological ramifications for both Bangladesh and Pakistan, and for relations between the two states. The effects were largely those which offered considerable political opportunities, openings which were capitalised upon in various ways and with varying degrees of success. In Bangladesh's case, Mujib's demise suggested to successors that a markedly different political approach should be adopted in order to distance themselves from the 'taint' of Mujib's style of administration. The civil and military dissatisfaction with Mujib's ineffective, autocratic and pro-Indian regime provided considerable political leverage for his opponents, particularly from within the regular armed forces which had been denied, until 1975, an influential role in the governance of Bangladesh. Mujib's unpopularity, particularly with the military, and his subsequent assassination therefore paved the way for the establishment of military rule in Bangladesh. The political path

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<sup>57</sup> *Bangladesh Observer*, 27 October 1980.

deemed by Ziaur Rahman as being the most politically expedient was one which was partly dictated by his perceptions of Mujib's failure. In order to cultivate support and legitimise his regime, Zia adopted a more independent stance towards the Indian government, espoused democratic sentiments (which Mujib was perceived to have betrayed by instituting one-party rule), and promoted what he believed would be a more defined and acceptable formula for national identity and unity; a combination of Bangladeshi nationalism and Islamic consciousness. To a considerable extent, such goals were aimed at rejecting Indian political involvement in Bangladesh, and therefore were well-suited to an acceptance of Bhutto's enthusiastic offers of rapprochement.

For Pakistan, the ideological implications of Mujib's assassination were also considerable and comparable, in some ways, with those occurring in Bangladesh. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 had meant not only an overwhelming military defeat at the hands of arch-rival India. It also represented the greatest ideological challenge to the validity of Pakistan's existence yet encountered, an impact which has been described thus:

The trauma associated with the 1971 dismemberment is not necessarily visible, but it permeates the attentive public's psyche. Jinnah's epochal creation has already been given a severe blow, and no politically conscious Pakistani can ignore or conceal the pain that secession has caused.<sup>58</sup>

It was likely, therefore, that any momentous event occurring within Bangladesh would be interpreted in Pakistan in terms which reflected the humiliation and insecurity which the 1971 defeat had generated, legacies for which both the Indian government and the Pakistan military were portrayed as most responsible.

The fortunes of Bhutto's political career at times hinged upon events occurring in Bangladesh. The convincing defeat of the Pakistan military in December 1971, and the subsequent ousting of Yahya Khan handed Bhutto the chance to fulfil his ambition to become leader of Pakistan. The opportunity easily could have been lost for a less seasoned politician, but Bhutto succeeded, until his eventual downfall in 1977, in turning possible pitfalls into advantages. In establishing his credentials, Bhutto especially had to play down his own part in the 1971 defeat, as pointed out by Tahir-Kheli:

The first task for Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as he came to power on December 20, 1971 in what was left of Pakistan was to gain some measure of respectability for the country. He

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<sup>58</sup> L. Ziring (et al.) (eds), *Pakistan: The Long View*, Durham, 1977, p. 6.

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had not only to live down the image of a government committing atrocities against its own population but also to wipe out the lingering suspicion that he had played a critical role in the dismemberment.<sup>59</sup>

In attempting to remove that suspicion, Bhutto also aimed to turn the overwhelming defeat for Pakistan into something much less damning to the national psyche, and thereby to accrue reflected political benefits. Since the military had already been discredited, Bhutto opted for the next most politically expedient course in legitimising his claim to the leadership: an approach which focused blame on the Indian government for the so-called 'dismemberment' of Pakistan. In early 1972, Bhutto terminated Pakistan's 24-year-old membership of the Commonwealth because the other members had agreed to recognise Bangladesh within a few weeks of Pakistan's defeat. Bhutto protested that the Commonwealth had sanctioned 'blatant aggression by one member against another and endorsed the use of force for the dismemberment of an independent, sovereign state.'<sup>60</sup>

Bhutto's visit to China in February 1972 was also aimed at bolstering his notion that India was responsible for a heinous violation of Pakistan's sovereignty; an accusation which received a sympathetic response from premier Chou En-lai who declared that China would assist the Pakistani people in their 'just struggle to preserve their State sovereignty and territorial integrity against outside aggression'.<sup>61</sup> The Chinese government had proved to be unreliable and unhelpful in the 1971 war, but Bhutto opted for the politically pragmatic course of ignoring, rather than criticising this slight. Accepting the rhetorical assurances of Pakistan's most powerful ally, rather than drawing attention to China's disloyalty, was much more likely to bear political fruit. While China had failed to provide tangible assistance to Pakistan during the war, Pakistan could at least glean some boost in morale from China's post-war rhetorical blandishments; in particular, China's interpretation of the phenomenon of Bangladesh's independence being put in terms of a state which had emerged due to Bengali elite interests, rather than because of a 'genuine grass roots peasant movement'.<sup>62</sup> In entertaining Chinese rhetoric, Bhutto was attempting to strengthen Sino-Pakistan relations and thereby restore at least

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59 S. Tahir-Kheli, 'The Foreign Policy of 'New' Pakistan', *Orbis*, vol. 20, no. 3, Fall 1976, p. 734.

60 *Asian Recorder*, March 4-10, 1972, p. 10645.

61 *ibid.*, p. 10648.

62 S. Tahir-Kheli, *op. cit.*, p. 735.

some degree of credibility and prestige for Pakistan, and himself, in the post-1971 international arena.<sup>63</sup>

The 1971 war and its aftermath reinforced Bhutto's hand in Pakistan, while at the same time acting to undermine the normally powerful political influence of the military elite which otherwise would have posed the greatest challenge to Bhutto's supremacy. The Indian government, the traditional scapegoat for Pakistani problems, fulfilled the role again perfectly. Despite the 'just and honorable peace' of the Simla Agreement',<sup>64</sup> the sensitivity of the links between Pakistan and India, associated particularly with the on-going Kashmir dispute, ensured that leaders of both states would continue to capitalise on events in the region at the expense of each other.

Just as the emergence of Bangladesh offered Bhutto political advantages, Mujib's assassination also appeared to present fresh opportunities which Bhutto speedily adopted. Mujib's demise and the general lack of grief manifested in Bangladesh, as well as the ensuing decline in Indo-Bangladesh relations provided an ideological salve for Pakistan by representing a counter to the eroding effects of Bangladesh's emergence on the validity of the Two-Nation theory. These developments also appeared to confirm the propaganda used by Bhutto that Bangladesh had come into being as part of an Indian stratagem to reabsorb Pakistan and dominate the South Asian region. Bhutto was aware of the ideological leverage which Mujib's assassination offered, hence his alacrity in recognising Mujib's successor regime, led by Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed. Since Bangladesh had so obviously declined to accept the Indian umbrella, and appeared willing to cultivate warmer relations with Pakistan, then such developments might be played upon to build national unity and identity in Pakistan. Amiable relations between the two states could be portrayed as evidence that Bangladesh's emergence did not necessarily bring Pakistan's *raison d'être* into question. A hint of these sentiments occurs in the following comment by Bhutto who, in criticising India's attempts to 'interfere and regulate the affairs of Bangladesh' and further justifying his recognition of the new regime in Bangladesh, declared:

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<sup>63</sup> As well as consolidating Pakistan's links with China, Bhutto also reaffirmed Pakistan's ties with the Islamic states which had supported Pakistan during the war, by offering his thanks in person in his 'journey among brothers' in 1972. See S. Tahir-Kheli, *op. cit.*, p. 734.

<sup>64</sup> According to Bhutto, this was what the Simla Agreement offered. See S. Tahir-Kheli, *op. cit.*, p. 740.

'Pakistan wanted that the people of Bangladesh should not suffer any more. It respected them as the people of both the countries had lived together for 25 years and they share a common faith. "We are interested in the welfare of the people of Bangladesh"....[T]he two peoples were once part of the same country. They had close relations. It was natural that even after separation "we would not like to do anything which would add to the problems of Bangladesh".<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately for Bhutto, the Pakistan military also reaped benefit from Mujib's removal. India's newly-acquired nuclear capability had created fears in Pakistan,<sup>66</sup> acting to revitalise the Pakistan military to some extent, but the events occurring in Bangladesh in 1975 also offered a tangible opening for the restoration of military prestige in Pakistan. Mujib's assassination meant that the actions of the Pakistan military in 1971 could be reinterpreted in a less blameworthy light. The civil and military unrest which enveloped Pakistan in 1977 culminated in the reinstatement of military rule, but the renewal of military prestige and the acceptance of military power in Pakistan were also due partly to the face-saving ideological ramifications of Mujib's assassination and Bangladesh's subsequent spurning of Indian patronage.

The impact of events occurring within Bangladesh following Mujib's assassination also played a part in ensuring that the new course in Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan would become established. Ziaur Rahman's assumption of power and his attempts to consolidate his position as leader of Bangladesh required that he appeal to those groups which had been excluded from Mujib's generally pro-Indian cadre. Acquiring strong political support also led Zia to cultivate groups with an Islamic orientation, a political strategy which further alienated his regime from India's avowed secular government and in turn accorded more with Bhutto's increasing attention to his Islamic allies. To counteract possible Indian intervention in Bangladesh,<sup>67</sup> Zia's obvious option was to appeal to India's adversary, Pakistan, especially since Bhutto had expressed his approval of the changes occurring within Bangladesh.

Ziaur Rahman was also able to exploit Indo-Pakistani differences to strengthen his tenuous position. This strategy, in turn, played into the hands of the Pakistani government, thereby acting to strengthen the incipient warmth

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<sup>65</sup> *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 20 December 1975.

<sup>66</sup> S. Tahir-Kheli, *op. cit.*, p. 753.

<sup>67</sup> As referred to in Chapter Five, Article 9 of the Friendship Treaty, signed between Bangladesh and India in March 1972, implied that an anti-Indian regime in Bangladesh could be removed legitimately by the Indian government. For details of the treaty, see *Asian Recorder*, April 15-21, 1972, p. 10720.

of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. Such ploys drew attention to perceived Indian hegemonic designs. For example, in focusing on Zia's claim that 'foreign forces were out to destroy Bangladesh', the *Pakistan Times* had readily taken up Ziaur Rahman's appeal that 'certain elements inside the country...with the help of external forces [were] engaged in a conspiracy against the country's independence and sovereignty'.<sup>68</sup> The pressure of traditional Indo-Pakistani rivalry, combined with the ramifications of Mujib's assassination, was enough to set in motion the reversal in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, quite apart from the convergence of political perspective between the two states in 1977.

The discussion above points to the intimate link between the political activities occurring within each of the three South Asian states and how events happening within the least powerful of the three, Bangladesh, have had influential, wider regional repercussions. It also indicates the underlying role which Indo-Pakistani rivalry has played in determining the direction of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. It has been widely accepted, as illustrated in the extracts above, that once military regimes had emerged in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the diplomatic relations between the two states strengthened. Yet even without this convergence of political direction and outlook in 1977, the reversal in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations after August 1975 had already been initiated; speedily and with seemingly little grounds for doing so. The removal of Mujib and the subsequent shift in Bangladesh's foreign policy were sufficient to have considerable influence, not only on Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, but on Indo-Pakistan relations as well.

The Pakistan government interpreted regional events in terms of its preoccupation with India, as illustrated by the comment made by Bhutto, following Ziaur Rahman's coup in November 1975, that 'once diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh were established he saw no difficulty in the restoration of diplomatic relations with India under the present conditions'.<sup>69</sup> His comment revealed how the changes happening in Bangladesh were viewed in Pakistan as representing a favourable shift in the balance of power in South Asia, one which enabled Bhutto to appear magnanimous and conciliatory by offering a return to diplomatic relations with India. Those relations were restored within eight months, in July 1976.<sup>70</sup>

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68 *Pakistan Times* (Lahore), 25 November 1975.

69 *ibid.*, 12 November 1975.

70 *Bangladesh Observer*, 21 July 1976.

The pressure of Indo-Pakistani rivalry, often regarded as the primary determinant of regional relations, has been shown above to have played an influential role in the conduct of Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan, but relying on this notion alone is not adequate to explain the change which occurred in relations between the two states. The change can also be explained partly in terms of the convergence between unique, chance events and individual political ambitions and acumen. Bhutto and Ziaur Rahman in particular were able to consolidate their uncertain hold on power partly by skilfully playing upon fears of Indian domination, a traditional rallying point in Pakistan and a legacy which could be revived in Bangladesh. In aiming to undermine their rivals and, in turn, cultivate popular appeal, both leaders used similar strategies which they also both realised could be enhanced by the cultivation of a diplomatic rapprochement between the two states. In establishing a new direction for Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, Ziaur Rahman and Bhutto were able to circumvent the traumatic heritage of the 1971 war, although both leaders were assisted by the fact that the most divisive matters which emerged from the war<sup>71</sup> had been settled already.

While the depth of cordiality reached between Bangladesh and Pakistan during this period could not be described as great, the two states did achieve stability in their relations. Acknowledgment of this stability has been limited in studies of South Asian regional relations which tend to centre on the rivalry between the various states. Relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan after 1975 represented a divergence from the general characteristic normally attributed to regional relations; that they 'have been characterized by mutual suspicion, unfriendly relations and, at times, open conflict'.<sup>72</sup> The divergence also counters S.P. Cohen's view of the interrelationship between the major South Asian states which he described as one of coexisting extremes; an 'ambiguous embrace of love and hate, expectation and dread'.<sup>73</sup>

Even though Indo-Pakistani rivalry played an influential part in moulding the relationship between Bangladesh and Pakistan, the two states had reached, quickly and unexpectedly, a degree of stability and maturity which was not typical of regional relations up to that time. The lessons of the 1971 war had

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71 Such as Pakistan's official recognition of Bangladesh and the release of POWs.

72 S.M.M. Razvi, 'Conflict and Cooperation in South Asia', *The Round Table*, no. 299, 1986, p. 269.

73 S.P. Cohen, 'India, South Asia and the Superpowers: War and Society' in P. Wallace (ed.), *Region and Nation in India*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 234.

forced Bhutto to reappraise Pakistan's foreign relations, resulting in a more diversified foreign policy which professed 'friendship with all', but aimed especially to establish closer links with influential Islamic states. Indian military supremacy had been confirmed in the 1971 war, while Pakistan had suffered international criticism and domestic instability. Caution, pragmatism, realism and consolidation were therefore especially appropriate for Pakistan's foreign policy which Bhutto redirected accordingly. The need to recognise and act upon opportunities for establishing new and beneficial international ties was intrinsic to that redirection. Events such as Mujib's assassination were seen by Bhutto as particularly opportune. Ziaur Rahman also took Bangladesh's foreign policy in a different, less-aligned direction, one which echoed and converged with Bhutto's foreign policy aims, and hence reinforced the change from antagonism to cordiality and stability in Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan.

Despite the variety of pressures which have been isolated as impinging on the conduct of those relations, India's role has always been an integral one, extending beyond the notion of Indo-Pakistani rivalry. The methods by which Bhutto and Zia succeeded in establishing friendlier relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh indicated that popular fears of Indian domination existing in both states were easily played upon, outweighing whatever animosity and resentment lingered between their inhabitants.

## PART D

### BANGLADESH'S RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN, 1975-1990

#### CHAPTER EIGHT

##### A Maturing of Relations? 1982-1990

Little study has been made of the course of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations during Ershad's regime; even less than has been undertaken on relations during the Ziaur Rahman period.<sup>1</sup> This chapter approaches the subject by providing a broad interpretation of how Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan evolved during Ershad's regime, and by analysing the way in which both domestic and external events influenced the relationship. Again, the evidence contradicts the commonly-held notion that Bangladesh's domestic turmoil has been largely responsible for moulding the character of its diplomatic relations in South Asia.

Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan during the regime of Hussain Muhammad Ershad were no less dominated by Indo-Pakistani rivalry, individual political aspirations and factional political turmoil than they were while Ziaur Rahman was leader. Additional, and at times contradictory, pressures came to impinge on Bangladesh-Pakistan relations in the 1980s. These developments were due to a wide range of causes: extra-regional, regional and domestic. South Asia was experiencing an emerging sense of fellowship and co-operation with the launching of SAARC in 1985. At the same time, regional tensions were increasing, particularly because of escalating ethnic conflict<sup>2</sup> and deepening Indo-Pakistani friction, the latter fuelled by the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the subsequent military strengthening of Pakistan by the United States. The threat of nuclear warfare also began to exacerbate regional tension in the 1980s, as both Pakistan and India were widely believed to have attained nuclear weapons capability.<sup>3</sup> Mutual fear and distrust of India

<sup>1</sup> Relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh have received little scholarly attention in the literature. For a brief, biased and descriptive account of relations during Ershad's regime, see S.N. Kaushik, 'Pakistan's Relations with Bangladesh: An Overview of the Perception of the Leaders of the Two Countries', in S.R. Chakravarty, & V. Narain (eds), *Bangladesh, Volume Three: Global Politics*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 165-8. See also S.S. Islam, 'Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations: From Conflict to Cooperation', in E. Ahamed (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: A Small State's Imperative*, Dhaka, 1984, pp. 52-63.

<sup>2</sup> Mainly in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

<sup>3</sup> R.B. Rais, 'Pakistan in the Regional and Global Power Structure'. *Asian Survey*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1991, p. 383.

remained characteristic of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, guaranteeing them a degree of stability and harmony. At the same time, the negative bond of fear was not particularly conducive to innovative advancements in those relations. Domestic political, social and economic strife plagued both Bangladesh and Pakistan with increasing intensity during the second half of the decade, also tending to impede a maturing of relations between the two.

The long-standing tension and rivalry between Pakistan and India has had an intrinsic role in shaping South Asian interstate relations, as evident in the relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh. The conduct of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations in the 1980s was circumscribed to a considerable extent by the tension between India and Pakistan, as was the case during Ziaur Rahman's regime. Pakistan's foreign policy tended to react according to the dictates of habitual antagonism towards India, as illustrated in the preceding chapter.

The strength of Pakistan's foreign policy fixation on India was great enough to outweigh the dangers posed to Pakistani sovereignty by the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in December 1979. According to T.P. Thornton, even after the Soviet occupation, the 'Pakistanis remained aggravatingly preoccupied with the historic threat from the east, to the detriment of common efforts vis-à-vis the more real Soviet danger'.<sup>4</sup> H.W. Wriggins succinctly summarised the mutual preoccupation between Pakistan and India thus:

Indeed, it is as if the principals on both sides simply cannot refrain from touching each other's raw nerves - rather like siblings who have lived too long in cramped quarters. Whether the difficulties derive from the bitterness of years of inter-communal suspicion, from thirty-five years of conflict-ridden interstate relations, or from the imperative need of hard-pressed leaders to evoke public support by calling up reliable xenophobic emotions, it is hard to say.<sup>5</sup>

Pakistan's Indo-centric foreign policy did not mean that Soviet activities in Afghanistan were not of considerable concern. The repercussions for Pakistan and the South Asian region were substantial. As expressed by Wriggins, the 'shadow of Soviet power hung over the entire subcontinent, as never before'.<sup>6</sup> For much of the 1980s, Pakistan's foreign policy was driven by the Soviet presence in Afghanistan and its corresponding augmentation of Indian regional strength. Pakistan's response to the Soviet occupation was of a

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4 T.P. Thornton, 'Between the Stools?: U.S. Policy Towards Pakistan During the Carter Administration,' *Asian Survey*, vol. 22, no. 10, October 1982, p. 971.

5 W.H. Wriggins, 'Pakistan's Search for a Foreign Policy After the Invasion of Afghanistan', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1984, p. 298.

6 *ibid.*, p. 285.

dual nature. On one hand, Pakistan's India-focus was magnified greatly under the circumstances whereby it was sandwiched between India and the Soviet Union, India's most powerful and staunchest ally. On the other, Pakistan became preoccupied with expanding and strengthening its links outside the South Asian region, in order to offset the Soviet-Indian threat. For increased support, Pakistan turned to the Islamic middle east states, the People's Republic of China and the United States, the task made much easier because Pakistan was able to play on its vulnerability to Soviet expansionism.<sup>7</sup> Pakistan's initiatives bore considerable fruit, particularly in the form of a massive military aid package from the United States, worth US\$3.2 billion and including, what was, compared with India's arsenal, state-of-the-art military hardware.<sup>8</sup>

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan therefore served to alter the balance of power in South Asia, heightening tensions between Pakistan and India and boosting the subcontinental arms race. Because of the historical link between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Soviet activity in Afghanistan inevitably had consequences for relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh. Those relations were strengthened, on the whole, particularly during the initial years, because both states held a mutual fear of India and the Soviet Union. At the same time, Pakistan's boosted extra-regional quest for military and financial assistance, neither of which Bangladesh could supply, tended to impede the incipient maturity of the relationship, as explained below.

During the early 1980s, interaction between Pakistan and Bangladesh exhibited a gradual improvement in the warmth and stability which had been developing since 1974. As well as the Afghanistan crisis, events occurring within Pakistan and Bangladesh reinforced friendly relations between the two states, at least during the first half of the decade. Relations improved despite Bangladesh's political upheavals following Ziaur Rahman's assassination in 1981, and the subsequent fluctuations between civilian and military rule. Ziaur Rahman's successors, Abdus Sattar and later H.M. Ershad, were essentially pro-Pakistani, their foreign policy positions and diplomatic overtures countering the impact of domestic political uncertainty on relations.

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<sup>7</sup> For a relevant article, see W.H. Wriggins, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-303.

<sup>8</sup> The US assistance included F-16 aircraft, Cobra gunship helicopters, M48A5 tanks and Harpoon missiles. Pakistan became the fourth largest recipient of US military aid after Israel, Egypt and Turkey. S. Yasmeen, 'India and Pakistan: Why the Latest Exercise in Brinkmanship?', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1988/89, p. 69.

Following Zia's demise, mutual expressions of solidarity and support were offered between Bangladesh and Pakistan, with both states beginning to place great emphasis on their Islamic fraternity.<sup>9</sup> The Sattar government in Bangladesh began to take such a strongly-Islamic and pro-Pakistani stance that it aroused criticism from the Opposition. In vigorously defending his government's position, Sattar's Prime Minister, Shah Aziz Rahman, commented that the ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan could be strengthened even 'further within the framework of Islamic solidarity, and not merely bilaterally'.<sup>10</sup> He added that the 'promotion of Islamic solidarity' was one of the 'constitutional obligations' of the Bangladesh government.<sup>11</sup>

Within days of his coup in March 1982, Ershad acted to bring Bangladesh's foreign policy more into line with Pakistan's, adopting an assertively anti-Soviet, pro-United States stance. This was exemplified by the arrest of two Soviet attachés under suspicion of conducting espionage against Bangladesh,<sup>12</sup> followed up by Ershad's entreaties to the United States. In a somewhat orchestrated fashion, Ershad appealed to the United States for greater support following the arrests, playing on US concern over the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Ershad commented in an interview after the Soviet incident that he considered the Soviet Union to be 'very dangerous', declaring: 'We cannot trust them so much. They are very crude. They have such a mighty military machine.... We are really scared about what they may do next'.<sup>13</sup> He then drew attention to what he saw as the 'inadequate American responses to past Soviet moves'.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Ershad tempered his criticism with placatory expressions of good will, declaring that 'Bangladesh felt nothing but friendship toward the United States' and that he thought President Reagan to be 'a strong leader'.<sup>15</sup> Ershad no doubt hoped that the United States would be more forthcoming with an anti-Soviet regime in Bangladesh. If Pakistan could obtain such vast amounts of financial and military aid while negotiating from a position of weakness and vulnerability, then perhaps Bangladesh too might be able to share in some of the largesse.

9 This emphasis was partly in response to the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution and the ousting of the Shah of Iran.

10 *Dawn*, 25 November 1981.

11 *ibid.*

12 The attachés were found trying, for unexplained reasons, to set fire to 600 rolls of movie film. *New York Times* (New York), 11 April 1982.

13 *ibid.*

14 *ibid.*

15 *ibid.*

Ershad's concordant foreign policy was welcomed by Pakistan President, Zia-ul-Haq, who responded along Islamic lines. In an effusive review of relations in August 1982, Zia lauded what he saw as the close Islamic bond which existed, and would always exist, between Pakistan and Bangladesh:

Pakistan has got special regards for Bangladesh. We have lived for 24 years together. Then we were separated. But, whatever love, sympathy and affection we have for each other will never exhaust. None can snatch away our love. If Pakistan can maintain cordial relations with the countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal, why can she not have brotherly relations with Bangladesh. The love of a Muslim country for another Muslim country cannot be snatched away.<sup>16</sup>

The warm rhetoric was supported by a little substance in the following month, with Pakistan's recommencement of the scheme to repatriate the many thousands of Biharis stranded in Bangladesh after the independence war.<sup>17</sup> The task of resettling the Biharis, supporters of Pakistan during the war, had been hampered by government apathy and political expediency on Pakistan's part. While it represented progress, the repatriation move in October 1982 was little more than a symbolic gesture, made possible by the financial contributions of the Kuwait and Qatar governments.<sup>18</sup> Approximately 4,600 Biharis were moved on this occasion, while a further 250,000 awaited repatriation, languishing in sixty-six refugee camps scattered throughout Bangladesh.<sup>19</sup>

More substantial indications of strengthening diplomatic relations did begin to emerge at this time. In the same month, both governments decided to expand bilateral trade further and to reduce existing trade constraints.<sup>20</sup> Trade turnover between the two countries had increased almost five fold from US\$30 million in 1976-7 to US\$145 million in 1981-2, but both governments appeared determined to improve economic ties in the longer term, implementing strategies to create an equitable balance of trade.<sup>21</sup>

Diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan continued to improve in the following year, the highlights being the Dhaka visit by Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mr Sahibzada Yakub Khan on 11-12 August 1983,<sup>22</sup> and

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16 *Daily News*, 21 August 1982, cited in S.N. Kaushik, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

17 See Chapter Seven.

18 *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 5 October 1982

19 *ibid.*, and *New York Times* (New York), 18 May 1986.

20 *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 25 October 1982.

21 *ibid.*

22 *ibid.*, 12-13 August 1983.

Bangladesh's hosting of the Fourteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers on 6-10 December, as discussed below.<sup>23</sup>

The August visit by Sahibzada Yakub Khan was significant in that it represented the first official visit by a Pakistani Foreign Minister since Bangladesh's creation in 1971. The visit followed upon the inaugural meeting of South Asian Foreign Ministers at New Delhi, held on 1-2 August to launch the organisation, South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC). Sahibzada Yakub and his Bangladesh counterpart, Mr A. R. Shams-ud Doha, both espoused sentiments aimed to improve relations. The 'free and frank' discussions between the two foreign ministers, and their foreign policy pronouncements, reflected the growing emphasis on Islamic consciousness emerging throughout the Islamic world. Doha declared that both Bangladesh and Pakistan were 'heirs to a rich civilisation and culture with ties rooted deep in...[their] shared faith, traditions and values', adding that the bonds between the two countries had been 'reinforced by many common aims and similarity of approach to problems'.<sup>24</sup> He also stated that 'Bangladesh as a member of the OIC [Organisation of Islamic Conference] was concerting its efforts with like-minded countries, including Pakistan, to uphold the causes and interests of the world of Islam', standing 'firmly for the unity and solidarity of the Islamic community'.<sup>25</sup> Doha assured the Pakistan foreign minister of Bangladesh's concordant stand on major international issues, such as those concerning Afghanistan and Israel.<sup>26</sup> Sahibzada Yakub responded in kind, declaring that 'both Pakistan and Bangladesh were linked by spiritual affinities of a glorious faith, a shared history and cultural heritage'.<sup>27</sup> He also commented that 'both countries experienced alike the gravitational pull of the Islamic world and the two countries had cooperated closely in efforts to promote fraternal solidarity of the OIC'.<sup>28</sup>

The mutual exchanges of goodwill were accompanied by firm initiatives to strengthen relations, such as the signing of an Agreement on visas. Under the Agreement, travel facilities for citizens of both countries were extended and streamlined, replacing the existing *ad hoc* arrangement. Slight, but tangible progress was made concerning at least one of the two long-term irritants in

23 *ibid.*, 7, 8, & 11 December 1983.

24 *ibid.*, 12 August 1983.

25 *ibid.*

26 *ibid.*

27 *ibid.*

28 *ibid.*

Bangladesh-Pakistan relations: the repatriation of the Bihari refugees and the sharing of assets and liabilities.<sup>29</sup> When asked by the Bangladesh media about these two issues, the Pakistan foreign minister gave assurances regarding the former, categorising those who would be repatriated.<sup>30</sup> While there was little evidence that his visit had much of an impact on Pakistani commitment to the Bihari issue, it did at least show that Pakistan was willing to continue discussing the matter. Shahibzada Yakub was much less forthcoming on the subject of assets sharing,<sup>31</sup> as had been the standard approach of the Pakistan government since the 1971 war.

The fourteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers of December 1983, held in Dhaka for the first time, capped a year in which Bangladesh-Pakistan relations strengthened markedly, compared with the remainder of the decade. Ershad embraced his role as head of the host state for the conference, emphasising Bangladesh's flourishing Islamic heritage and his country's wholehearted determination to 'step up efforts' to promote 'greater unity and solidarity' among the Islamic *ummah*.<sup>32</sup> The conference marked a maturing of Bangladesh's foreign relations. In being bestowed with the honour of hosting the conference, Bangladesh had won the acceptance and confidence of the other OIC members, despite the earlier controversy surrounding Bangladesh's creation and the break with Islamic Pakistan. The OIC Secretary-General, Mr Habib Chatty, praised Bangladesh's role in making the conference a success, commenting that Bangladesh was now 'capable of hosting an OIC summit'.<sup>33</sup> Bangladesh was clearly becoming integrated with the growing international pan-Islamic consciousness, drawing Bangladesh's foreign policy more closely into line with Pakistan and many of the middle east Islamic states.

The extent to which both Pakistan and Bangladesh were becoming ensconced within the international Islamic community was perhaps best exemplified by the generous Saudi offers of assistance to both states for the purpose of resolving the Bihari repatriation issue. An agreement was eventually reached, after several years of negotiations between a Saudi humanitarian organisation and the Pakistan and Bangladesh governments, to assist in the

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29 For background detail, see Chapter Seven.

30 *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 13 August 1983.

31 *ibid.*

32 *ibid.*, 7 December 1983. *Ummah* means the 'community of believers'.

33 *ibid.*, 11 December 1983.

resettlement of Biharis who wished to move from Bangladesh to Pakistan.<sup>34</sup> Under the agreement, a trust fund was to be set up to raise US\$284 million to repatriate and rehabilitate the Biharis, then estimated to number 259,100.<sup>35</sup> The plan was not fulfilled, for reasons to be discussed below, but even as a mooted plan, it indicated the considerable potential for Bangladesh and Pakistan to resolve outstanding differences via the medium of Islamic fraternity.

Improved diplomatic ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan were also exemplified by Zia-ul-Haq's unscheduled visit to Bangladesh in June 1985 to inspect the impact of a recent severe cyclone and storm surge, and to 'share the sorrows' of those affected.<sup>36</sup> Zia's visit, described by a somewhat biased source as 'demonstratively pretentious', was essentially a diplomatic exercise. The gesture was, nevertheless, symbolic of the gradual 'normalising' and strengthening of the once-bitter relations between the two states. The spontaneous initiative by Pakistan's President may have lacked substance, but it appeared no less sincere than the similar, brief inspection visits by the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and the Sri Lankan President, Jayawardene, carried out three days earlier. Ershad hailed all three leaders for their concern, despite the fact that little practical aid was forthcoming.<sup>37</sup> The high-level visits were partly prompted by the imminent launching of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), scheduled to take place in December 1985. The link between increasing regional awareness and Ershad's enthusiastic response to Zia's brief visit was exemplified in the following press extract:

...H.M. Ershad welcomed...Ziaul Haq of Pakistan, saying that...[Bangladesh and Pakistan] were bound by "innumerable ties of friendship"....President Ershad observed that friendly cooperation between Dhaka and Pindi was developing to the mutual benefit of the peoples of both the countries. He believed that such cooperation would get a new impetus with the gradual evolution of SARC. He hoped that President Ziaul Haq's short visit would embolden "our resolve to strengthen cooperation in this region".<sup>38</sup>

34 The organisation, called the *Rabita El Alam Al Islami*, (The World Muslim League) was based in Mecca and was reported to have received pledges from various Arab oil-producing nations to pay for the rehabilitation project. *New York Times* (New York), 11 July 1988. See also *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 11 July 1988.

35 *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 11 July 1988.

36 *ibid.*, 6 June 1985. Approximately 11,000 people died in the cyclone. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, Volume XXXI, December 1985, p. 34051.

37 Immediate aid was offered by countries such as Saudi Arabia, Japan, the USA and the UK. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, Volume XXXI, December 1985, p. 34051.

38 *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 6 June 1985.

During the early to mid-1980s, therefore, Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan were heavily influenced by extra-regional and regional pressures, more so than by those of a domestic nature. Stimuli such as the Islamic movement; direct superpower involvement in Afghanistan and South Asia; the associated unease and suspicion between India and Pakistan, and conversely, the movement towards South Asian regional cooperation, all contributed towards a strengthening of Bangladesh-Pakistan relations.

The extent to which relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan had improved was tested more rigorously in the second half of the decade. Revived tension between India and Pakistan in 1986-87<sup>39</sup> ensured that the stable relationship developing between Bangladesh and Pakistan would continue to be based on a mutual fear of Indian dominance, more so than on positive and constructive considerations. Domestic political events occurring particularly in Pakistan in the late 1980s showed that Bangladesh-Pakistan relations still required a more meaningful basis for long-term stability.

The majority of the South Asian states, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, experienced increasing communal, ethnic and secessionist strife in the 1980s. Zia-ul-Haq's democratically-elected successor, Benazir Bhutto, became prime minister of Pakistan in November 1988, but her regime was weak, becoming increasingly preoccupied with the basic task of holding on to power. Consequently, her dealings with Bangladesh came to be circumscribed largely by her domestic plight, as explained below.

Political secessionism and communal tension in Pakistan escalated particularly in the most ethnically-diverse province, Sindh, and its capital, Karachi. The greatest rivalries existed between the four largest urban ethnic groups in the province: the Urdu-speaking *Muhajireen* (originally refugees who fled from India to Pakistan in 1947),<sup>40</sup> the native Sindhi-speakers, the Punjabis and the Pushtuns.<sup>41</sup> Further pressure was placed on native Sindh inhabitants by other ethnic immigrant groups, such as the Baluchis and the Biharis repatriated from Bangladesh.

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39 See Chapter Four.

40 *Muhajireen* descendants use the same term to describe themselves. For an historical overview of this linguistic, cultural group, see I.H. Malik, 'Ethno-Nationalism in Pakistan: A Commentary on Muhajir Qaumi Mahaz (MQM) in Sindh', *South Asia, Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. XVIII, no 2, 1995, pp. 50-52.

41 I.H. Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

A virtual explosion of immigration in Sindh produced serious political and ethnic disharmony in the province, with most of the various groups finding it impossible to co-exist without each fearing the loss of cultural identity and politico-economic power.<sup>42</sup> Extreme Sindhi nationalists demanded their own independent *Sindhodesh*, free of perceived Punjabi central government dominance, while violent ethnic clashes erupted between the different ethnic groups vying for political dominance in Karachi.<sup>43</sup> The unrest was quelled by military force, but continuing tension in the province placed considerable pressure on the central government.<sup>44</sup>

Each of the ethnic groups established political wings to defend their rights, the *Muhajireen* forming the *Muhajir Qaumi Mahaz* (MQM)<sup>45</sup> in 1984. The MQM developed into a major, power-broking political party in Pakistan, dominating urban Sindh. The activities of the MQM were to have far-reaching consequences not only for the stability of the Pakistan central government, but also for the relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

For reasons of its own, the MQM began to push for the repatriation of the remaining Biharis in Bangladesh following the sudden death of Zia-ul-Haq in August 1988.<sup>46</sup> In the ensuing struggle to lead the new government, Benazir Bhutto and her Sindhi-dominated Pakistan People's Party (PPP) emerged triumphant, but only after much intense political manoeuvring and bargaining. In order to secure an absolute majority in the National Assembly and to stabilise both urban and rural Sindh, Benazir was left with no option but to woo the PPP rival, the MQM.<sup>47</sup> Benazir's political survival was also heavily dependent on appeasing the military and the bureaucracy, both of which remained powerful and politically influential, despite Zia's demise, as explained by S.V.R. Nasr:

42 *ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

43 S. Yasmeen, *op. cit.*, p. 69. Communal riots occurring in Karachi from November 1986 to January 1987, primarily between the *Muhajireen* and the Pushtuns, resulted in over 200 dead and 500 wounded.

44 *ibid.* Further violence erupted in Karachi in September 1988, with more than 400 being killed during two days of rioting. I.H. Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

45 Migrant People's Movement.

46 The Biharis and the *Muhajireen* shared a common past as both groups originated as refugees who had fled India in 1947, the former moving to East Pakistan and the latter moving to the west wing. No doubt, the MQM wished to expand its support base, but the full explanation for why the MQM decided to take up the Bihari cause after Ziaul Haq's death is unclear. I.H. Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

47 J. Bray, 'Pakistan in 1989: Benazir's Balancing Act', *The Round Table*, no. 310, 1989, pp. 194-5.

Democracy...emerged by default once the ruling regime voluntarily stepped aside after the sudden death of Zia and his top brass in a plane crash on August 17, 1988....The military made a grand exit before the time when the democratic movement could have matured and overwhelmed it. The military was thus able to continue to exercise political power, although indirectly; this clearly placed democratic forces at a disadvantage and instead emboldened political forces loyal to Zia's legacy.<sup>48</sup>

Benazir's hold on political power was thus exceedingly tenuous, being compounded by the weakening of the PPP's organisational structure with her nepotistic appointment of loyal, but inexperienced, advisors in place of the PPP 'old guard'.<sup>49</sup>

In trying to cultivate MQM support, Benazir inevitably alienated traditional PPP supporters: the Sindhi nationalists. In the struggle to maintain authority in Sindh, the ruling PPP was 'constricted and enfeebled' by the impossible task of fulfilling the opposing dictates of the two groups.<sup>50</sup> The repatriation of the Biharis, in particular, became a highly politicised issue in Karachi as the PPP tried, on one hand, to be seen as complying with the MQM's stance on the issue, but on the other, procrastinating so as to avoid provoking the Sindhi nationalists.<sup>51</sup> The volatility associated with the Bihari problem in Sindh, and the PPP's vulnerability, forced Benazir to treat the issue with extreme caution, as was evident in her visit to Bangladesh in October 1989.

Benazir's visit to Bangladesh was touted as a 'new era of closer relations',<sup>52</sup> where Pakistan was prepared to cooperate with Bangladesh in 'all walks of life without any reservations or qualifications'.<sup>53</sup> In reality, the visit achieved very little of substance, Benazir's assurances clearly not applying to the Biharis, with whom she refused to meet. In hoping to reduce both Pakistan's responsibility for the Biharis, and the extent of the violence in Sindh, Benazir was also 'believed to have requested that Dhaka resettle them [the Biharis] permanently in Bangladesh with financial assistance from Pakistan and other Islamic countries'.<sup>54</sup> Benazir's obvious evasiveness and back-tracking on the Bihari issue provoked not only criticism in Bangladesh but also precipitated a crisis in Sindh, prompting renewed and widespread political violence in the

48 S.V.R. Nasr, 'Democracy and the Crisis of Governability in Pakistan', *Asian Survey*, vol. 32, no. 6, 1992, p. 523.

49 *ibid.*, p. 525.

50 *ibid.*, p. 529.

51 *ibid.*

52 *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 4 October 1989.

53 *ibid.*, 2 October 1989.

54 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 'Left in limbo: Bhutto appears to backtrack on the Biharis issue', 19 October 1989, p. 23.

province.<sup>55</sup> Benazir's attempts to skirt the Bihari issue failed and the MQM withdrew its political support for the PPP, defecting to the opposition,<sup>56</sup> and contributing towards the downfall of the PPP government in the following year.

Benazir's vulnerable, unstable and erratic regime was in no position to initiate significant advances in Pakistan's relations with Bangladesh. Even domestically, the PPP government's performance was lack-lustre, with not a single new piece of legislation being passed or even introduced, apart from two annual budgets.<sup>57</sup> The larger state's increasing domestic instability overshadowed foreign policy dealings, as had occurred with relations between India and Bangladesh. The chances for establishing very strong relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh were certainly there, particularly given the foreign policy characteristics common to both states. The Islamic link presented particular scope for manipulation, as had been undertaken by both Zia-ul-Haq and Ershad, the latter declaring Islam to be the state religion in June 1988.<sup>58</sup> This step defined Bangladesh's increasingly Islamic outlook, presenting further opportunities to improve relations with Pakistan. Benazir Bhutto was unable to exploit either of these common bonds effectively. Her policy on both India and Islam lacked clarity and consistency.

Concerning India, Benazir fluctuated between two extremes. In early 1990, she announced a policy of rapprochement with India with 'great fanfare'.<sup>59</sup> Indian analysts, such as P.S. Bhogal, were cautiously optimistic that Benazir's democratically-elected regime and her co-operative overtures towards India heralded a break-through in relations, creating 'enhanced confidence and goodwill between the two countries'.<sup>60</sup> Benazir was forced to change her policy towards India during her ultimately unsuccessful struggle for political survival from mid-1989 to August 1990. The Kashmir dispute also re-erupted in early 1990, prompting Benazir to adopt a more antagonistic stance towards India in the hope of gaining domestic support.<sup>61</sup> In heightening fears of India, the Pakistan government was also using a standard technique to channel domestic criticism away from itself. Benazir's *volte-face* towards India was pronounced

55 *The Times* (London), 25 & 27 October 1989.

56 *ibid.*

57 J. Bray, 'Nawaz Sharif's New Order in Pakistan', *The Round Table*, no. 318, 1991, p. 181.

58 *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 8 June 1988.

59 S.V.R. Nasr, *op. cit.*, p. 529.

60 P.S. Bhogal, 'Pakistan's India Policy: Shift from Zia to Benazir', *India Quarterly*, vol. XLV, no. 1, Jan.-Mar., 1989, p. 43.

61 S.V.R. Nasr, *op. cit.*, p. 529.

enough even to win the approval of Pakistan's extremist Islamic party, the *Jama'at-e Islami*.<sup>62</sup>

Benazir's regime was equally contradictory with regard to implementing a decisive policy on Islam. Increasing ethnic rivalry made it much more difficult for Benazir to promote Islam as a focus for national unity than it was for her predecessor. Benazir had also inherited former PPP leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's, comparatively secular political platform which she advocated wholeheartedly before being elected, denouncing Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation measures in 'the strongest terms'.<sup>63</sup> Once in power, Benazir realised, somewhat belatedly, that it was politically necessary to pursue a more moderate line or be condemned as anti-Muslim.<sup>64</sup> In attempting to find an appropriate Islamic stance, Benazir and the PPP were well behind their political rivals. While the PPP was being forced to reconsider its avowedly secular platform, parties such as the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IJI) were already thoroughly experienced in harnessing the emotive power of Islam.<sup>65</sup> The PPP's weak and vacillating approach to the notion of Islamic identity therefore meant that this avenue for strengthening relations with Bangladesh lacked the focus and momentum which existed under Zia-ul-Haq.

Examining Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan in the 1980s shows that they fluctuated in warmth according to a wide range of pressures: extra-regional, regional and domestic. Some of these worked against an improvement in relations, some ensured that the relationship remained stable on the whole, while others, such as the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, appeared to do both.

There were many consequences of the Soviet activity in the region. One of the more fundamental results was that Pakistan gained an unprecedented amount of financial and military support, and, just as importantly, a great deal of morale-boosting international sympathy. The latter had been in very short supply, particularly since Bangladesh's independence war, where Pakistan had been humiliated in defeat and widely condemned for its actions. Certainly, before 1980, Pakistan had had a great deal of difficulty in developing and

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 529-530.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 530.

<sup>64</sup> J. Bray, 'Pakistan in 1989: Benazir's Balancing Act', *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

<sup>65</sup> S.V.R. Nasr, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

maintaining associations with other countries.<sup>66</sup> In gaining such vital support during the Afghanistan crisis, the stigma of Pakistan's earlier defeat and dismemberment was mitigated to some extent, perhaps reducing the psychological encumbrance which had been integral to relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh. At the very least, the Afghanistan crisis assisted in keeping Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan on an even keel.

From one perspective, Bangladesh and Pakistan were drawn closer together by their mutual fear of Soviet-Indian intentions. From another, both became more interested in improving extra-regional links, opportunities for which were stimulated by Soviet activity in Afghanistan. Their extra-regional focus was developed at the expense of initiating improvements in relations with each other.

Pakistan was also beginning to realise that while it was advantageous to have friendly relations with Bangladesh, the smaller state was, nevertheless, starting to play a more influential role in South Asian political affairs. Bangladesh's regional and international stature and recognition had improved considerably, prompted by such factors as its election in 1978 for a two-year term on the United Nations Security Council and its instrumental role in the creation of SAARC. Bangladesh gained in confidence and independence as a result, and, in turn, a cool cautiousness became more evident in Pakistan's attitude towards Bangladesh in the second half of the 1980s. In August 1989, for example, relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh became particularly strained because of Pakistan's humiliation over a pre-emptive SAARC initiative made by Bangladesh.<sup>67</sup> A trade deal made by Bangladesh in the same year also incensed Pakistan. Bangladesh agreed to purchase 200,000 tonnes of rice from Bangkok at a higher rate than the concessional offer which had already been made by Pakistan.<sup>68</sup> In retaliation, Pakistan ceased buying tea from Bangladesh,

<sup>66</sup> L. Ziring, 'Pakistan and India: Politics, Personalities, and Foreign Policy', *Asian Survey*, vol. 18, no. 7, 1978, p. 719.

<sup>67</sup> Plans for the SAARC foreign minister's meeting, scheduled to be held in Islamabad later in the month, were disrupted by a dispute between Sri Lanka and India. Sri Lanka was insisting that India withdraw the Indian Peace-Keeping Force from its soil or it would refuse to attend the meeting and, furthermore, would not host the following year's SAARC summit. Bangladesh's foreign minister, Anisul Islam Mahmud, made an impromptu visit to India and Sri Lanka in an attempt to mediate in the dispute and to persuade Sri Lanka to cease agitation and attend the meeting. As host for the foreign minister's meeting, Pakistan considered that it had the responsibility to mediate and ought to have been consulted properly by Bangladesh. For details, see *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 'Strained relations: Bangladesh initiative over Saarc upsets Pakistan', 3 August 1989, p. 23.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

cancelling a trade arrangement which was worth US\$30 million per year to Bangladesh.<sup>69</sup> These disagreements showed that while relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan were maturing during Ershad's regime, the tradition of distrust in South Asian regional politics ensured that relations retained a degree of wariness. They also indicated that little rapport existed between Ershad and Benazir.

Pakistan's increasing domestic turmoil in the 1980s played a large part in hampering relations with Bangladesh, just as India's internal problems had marred relations with Bangladesh. Also common to both sets of relations was the manner in which they often varied according to the individual political aspirations of those in power. Benazir Bhutto, and Zia-ul-Haq to a less blatant extent, reacted to the Bihari repatriation issue according to domestic political priorities, with little regard for the impact on the Biharis themselves or on relations with Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government also exploited, and continued to use such issues for political gain, and as a bargaining chip to extract possible concessions from the Pakistan government.<sup>70</sup> The Chittagong Hill Tract problem exhibited a similar pattern, where a minority group became a pawn in the conduct of bilateral relations, politicising the group in the process, and ensuring that the issue would remain unresolved.

Relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan retained a degree of cordiality and stability during Ershad's regime, despite increasing domestic and regional strife. Nevertheless, the depth of the warmth did not mature to a notable extent, despite ample opportunities. In fact, as relations developed in the 1980s, they began to fall into some of the patterns associated with the ever-present rivalry between India and Pakistan. The Pakistan government did not effectively grasp the advantages which could have accrued from cultivating a staunch regional ally through skilful diplomacy. Instead, Pakistan tended to remain regionally aloof, preferring to court more powerful, external allies and the nuclear option,<sup>71</sup> rather than look to Bangladesh for moral support.

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> In August 1992, for example, Bangladesh's new Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, revitalised the Bihari issue, along with other outstanding matters such as asset-sharing, to strengthen her domestic popularity. The Pakistan government, then under Nawaz Sharif, was receptive to reopening the Bihari issue because he had the support of the MQM and hoped, in turn, to antagonise and put pressure on his opponent, Benazir, and her Sindhi-based PPP. For details see *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 'The begum's gambit: Khaleda's plan to return Pakistani refugees', 6 August 1992, p. 23.

<sup>71</sup> For an analysis of Pakistan's quest for nuclear capability, see Gowher Rizvi, 'The Rivalry Between India and Pakistan' in B. Buzan (et al.), *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers*, New York, 1986, pp. 120-121.