

Chapter 2

Domestic Variables: Compulsions of Competitive Politics

The Ganges dispute embodies not only templates of hydropolitics but also represents historical, political, cultural and social perceptions and prejudices of the two nation-states. These aspects have shaped the relationship of two neighbours to what it is today—warm and cold at same time. They are characterised as domestic variables. The discussion on these aspects is warranted because they are underpinnings on which lay the government's negotiation process and its outcomes. By quirk of fate, India is present in the domestic political discourse of Bangladesh which has played an important role in the bilateral relationship in general and Ganges river water dispute in particular.

India and Bangladesh have had a long-shared social, cultural and political history. Bengalis of east and west lived together for ages till partitioned into two entities in 1905 and 1947. The history of relationship between the two communities—Hindus and Muslims—having separate belief system, mostly belonging to unequal economic strata and numerical disparity led to have different political aspirations in both wings. The simmering tensions between the two communities culminated into partition of British India. Muslim majority east Bengal became part of newly formed Pakistan.

The present chapter is structured in the following manner. The first section discusses the common history being shared by India and Bangladesh. The second section deals with emergence of India as a factor in Bangladesh politics. The following section examines evolution of Indian federalism and its impact on Indo-Bangladesh relationship. The last section highlights deliberations of the Parliament on the Ganges. The chapter ends with the conclusion.

2.1 Shared History and Divergent Aspirations

Here history is employed in an explanatory role to understand India and Bangladesh relationship. Hindus and Muslims lived together for ages but incidents from 1757 to 1947 were critical in deepening and widening the gulf between them.¹ Though it is difficult to cover a long history in such a small space, only important events have been selected to demonstrate the gradual consolidation of two communities along religious lines. The British East India Company made Calcutta centre of business activities which overshadowed other parts of Bengal. While Calcutta had 35 million population, Dacca (the present day Dhaka), the next largest city after Calcutta, had only about 51,000 inhabitants. Demographically, there was almost equal numeric balance between these two major religious communities in both parts, more Hindu rural population to the West and more Muslim population to the east.

Following the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the Permanent Settlement was introduced which granted the landlord the right to collect land revenue in Bengal. This enhanced the dominance of Calcutta. Under the new settlement, *Zamindars* (landlords) became virtual owner of the land. It was the Zamindar who collected taxes from the tillers. The rate of rent was fixed. The zamindars were bound to pay their taxes without failure. The Permanent Settlement act engendered communal feelings because most of the zamindars were Hindus and most of the ryots (tillers) were Muslims in East Bengal. This consolidated the two communities on communal lines in spite of the fact that the issues involved were about economics of rent.

Another major incident was the *first war of independence* or *sepoy mutiny* in 1857.² Following this, the administration was taken over by the British government from East India Company in 1858. The British announced major changes in the Indian administration. Lord Ripon brought a very limited elective principle through his act on local government. The franchise rules mandated either property ownership or educational attainments necessary for participation in voting. This was understood by the Muslims as unfavourable to them because of the stringent franchise rules. Even Muslim dominated areas were not going to be benefitted by this. Another important consequence was that the British divided Indian population into martial and non-martial races which further deepened the distrust between Hindus and Muslims.³ Lord Curzon partitioned Bengal in the name of administrative convenience. According to this new arrangement, whereas the eastern

¹Good description of about cultural transformation of the period is given in Joya (1994), Harun ar Rashid (2003), Iqbal (2010).

²There is a disagreement among the historians whether to call this as first war of Indian independence or sepoy mutiny.

³Martial races means those who were considered brave and well-built for fighting. Non-martial were those according to the British unfit for fighting.

province was joined with Assam into the province of eastern Bengal and Assam; the remaining area became the province of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, each with a Lieutenant Governor.

This decision was fiercely opposed by the Hindu Bengalis. Some of the important Hindu Bengalis like poet Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh lent their voices and pens to the protest. Lord Curzon toured eastern side of Bengal to convince and explain Muslim leaders how they would benefit from the decision. The Muslims of east Bengal took the partition very favourably. In 1906, a group of leading Muslims met in Dhaka at the invitation of Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka where they laid the foundation of the All-India Muslim League. The basic goals of the Muslim League were to support the Crown and to work for the interests of the community in India. The League saw a great opportunity in the partition of Bengal. Soon, the eastern Bengal Muslims began realising the advantages of being a separate province.

Muslims supported the partition because they saw in it the opportunity to make Dhaka as the centre of activity. Soon, it became the bustling city with full of activities. Muslims particularly the Muslim peasants gave a call to boycott campaign, made anti-zamindar and anti-money lenders' slogans, who were mostly Hindus which, in turn, led to a number of communal disturbances in some of the districts of eastern Bengal and Assam during 1907. The Swadeshi movement was started by the anti-partition group which opposed the British decision to partition Bengal. These leaders of the Swadeshi movement spoke for all Bengalis but the symbols they used and the achievements they referred to were predominantly of Hindus. The words used by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Vivekananda, Keshub Sen, Bipin Pal, Surendranath Banerjee or Romesh Dutt did not appeal to Muslims.

In 1911, the British decided to annul the partition of Bengal. For the moderates of Bengal, the nullification of the partition was the cherished goal of many years of petitioning, and they assumed their political methods vindicated. On the other hand, the Muslims of Bengal felt betrayed. Nawab Salimullah expressed his anger over the decision at the Calcutta session of the Muslim League in the presidential address, "to us, the Musalmans of East Bengal, the annulment means the deprivation of those splendid opportunities at self-improvement which we had secured by the Partition".⁴

Another incident which further deepened the gulf between the two communities was the Communal Award of 1932 which accepted most of the demands of the Muslims. While this award was accepted by the Muslim League, Indian National Congress opposed it. Finally on March 2, 1940, in Lahore, the Muslim League passed a resolution which is called the "Pakistan resolution". Fazlul Haq, an important Bengali leader, was among the movers of the resolution. In the 1946 election, Bengali Muslims voted overwhelmingly for the Muslim League. Among

⁴Quoted in (Ahmed 2004), p. 278.

Muslims, the League received 82 % of the votes, polling over 2 million Muslim votes and capturing 114 out of 121 Muslim seats, the highest for any of the Muslim-majority provinces.⁵ Thus, the 1946 elections ensured a Muslim League government in Bengal. H.S. Suhrawardy became the Prime Minister of Bengal and remained in that position till 1947.

Immediately, after the decision of the British to withdraw from India, partition of territories into two entities became urgent and critical. A Commission was formed by the British to be headed by Sir (later Lord) Cyril Radcliffe. The Muslim League demanded that the Bengal province should be partitioned on the basis of contiguity and majority principle.⁶ Thus, it was decided to “demarcate the boundaries of the two parts (the province) on the basis of ascertaining contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims while taking into other factors”.⁷ This principle was followed for division of Bengal except in two cases. The representatives of Hindus insisted that Murshidabad be included in West Bengal although it was a Muslim-majority district. According to continuous majority principle, Murshidabad should have gone to Pakistan and Khulna, a Hindu-majority province, should have come to India. But decision was taken otherwise. It was generally agreed that the survival of Hooghly as a port (and of Calcutta as an entrepot of trade) depended on its link with the river Ganges, which flowed through the northern edge of Murshidabad. The commission accepted the demand of the Congress that Murshidabad should be given to West Bengal.⁸ It is generally seen as a bargain for Khulna, a large Hindu-majority district to the east of 24 Parganas, for Murshidabad.⁹

This is the brief historical background of the circumstances leading to the partition of India. Though this is not detailed description of incidents leading to partition, it highlights palpable tensions prevailing in the society which finally led to total rupture in 1947. East Bengal became eastern part of Pakistan on religious grounds. But very soon, relationship between east and west Pakistan soured. After a great loss of lives in fierce military clampdown carried by the Pakistani forces, east Pakistan emerged as Bangladesh, an independent sovereign entity in 1971. India played a critical role in the struggle of Bengalis to become an independent nation. But the Indian participation has not been appreciated unequivocally.

Since India and Bangladesh are closely connected, domestic changes in India make a big impact on neighbour. Indian federation, which will be explained below, has evolved from a mute spectator to active shaper of foreign policy that had bearing on the construction of the farakka barrage.

⁵Harun-or-Rashid, op. cit., pp. 214–215.

⁶Chakraborty (1974), p. 53.

⁷Quoted in (Joya 1999), p. 196.

⁸Chatterji op. cit., 1999, p. 215.

⁹Ibid., p. 210.

2.2 Compulsions of Indian Federalism

2.2.1 *West Bengal Being Conscious of Its Position*

Immediately after independence, West Bengal was affected by policy changes of the central government and separation of east Bengal. Economically, as in so many other spheres, there was an age-old interdependence between the two Bengalis. With partition, this interdependence was breached. Business activities had developed in West Bengal during direct colonial rule, but their main market was east Bengal (two thirds of old Bengal). Thus, West Bengal has to bear the brunt of the loss of market and huge rush of migration of Bengalis from Pakistan. The central government was criticised for not giving attention to migration issue from the eastern side as much as it did to the western side of the border.¹⁰ East Bengal was the main centre of jute production. After partition, West Bengal's share of the jute duty was cut by the central government on the ground of loss of the jute-growing areas to Pakistan, thus the erosion of revenue share. West Bengal's share of the income tax was also reduced on the ground of the loss of population and area as a result of partition.¹¹ All these policy changes did not go down well with people of West Bengal. "People of West Bengal widely assumed that the central government has been discriminating against them. Policies in the form of excise or what, financial policies of the centre discriminated against the state and in favour of states like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu".¹² West Bengal's industrial and commercial interests were seriously affected.

As discussed in the first chapter, many commissions and committees had already concluded that the Farakka barrage should be constructed to solve the problem of the Calcutta port. Port maintenance work comes under the central government according to the provisions of the constitution. Owners of shipping and commercial interests had been protesting against the decreasing draught of the Hooghly river.¹³ They felt that their interests were not taken care of by the central government especially when Man Singh Committee (constituted to study the possibility of Farakka barrage) had already recommended the construction of barrage in 1952 only. From 1953 onwards, Members of Parliament began to question the Central government's delay in the construction of the Farakka barrage regularly. West Bengal government also demanded the central government to construct the Farakka barrage to desilt the port of Calcutta.

Members of Parliament (MP) from West Bengal began pressurising the central government for the Farakka barrage regularly. In 1954, in one of the discussions, a West Bengal Member of Parliament made the Deputy Minister of Railways and

¹⁰Ghosh (2011), p. 387–388.

¹¹Roy (1971), p. 36.

¹²This argument has been developed by Roy (1971).

¹³Draught is defined as the depth of a ship by her outer line up to which she submerges in water with safety.

Transport to accept that the River Hooghly had been deteriorating as a result of “lack of perennial upland discharge” and the “play of natural tidal forces”. In return, the minister conceded that the Ganges Barrage scheme had been under consideration.¹⁴ Again in 1955, another West Bengal MP tried to increase the pressure on the government by asking: is it not a fact that the research station (The Central Water and Power research station) at Poona has commented that unless the Ganges Barrage scheme is taken up, the passage of the Calcutta Port is not safe for transportation, and if so, why is the Ganges Barrage not being taken up at the present?.... The Deputy Minister of Railways and Transport Mr. Alagesan replied:

... There is no use of raising this alarm that the Calcutta Port will be threatened if something is not done. This alarm has been there for a number of years. But the particular question whether there should be a barrage constructed at a particular point is, I think, under the consideration of the Ministry of Irrigation.¹⁵

Serious discussions were already going on in the West Bengal assembly for construction of the Farakka barrage. Speaking during the 1959 budget debate in the West Bengal Assembly, Bankim Mukherjee, a member for the Communist Party of India, criticised New Delhi's attitude towards West Bengal. “The Farakka Barrage scheme had not yet been taken up for execution though Calcutta Port was dying. It was the Centre's policy he alleged, to move important government offices from Calcutta to Bombay”.¹⁶

Year after year, aggressiveness of the members of Parliament from West Bengal became fierce. Members used all possible Parliamentary tools available to them to influence the central government. In 1956, a ‘cut motion’ was introduced which proposed a cut in the grant of the Ministry of Irrigation and Power by a nominal Rupees 100 because of the “delay in preparing the Ganges Barrage Scheme”.¹⁷ A similar motion was put in place again in 1956.¹⁸ In September 1958, the Minister of Irrigation and Power made a statement on the Ganges Barrage Project before the Lok Sabha, and in November it was debated by the house for two-and-a-half hours.¹⁹

Thus, it underlines the continuous pressure exerted by members of Parliament from West Bengal in support of demand for the Farakka barrage since 1950s. Another member of Parliament for Berhampore, West Bengal, T.K. Chaudhuri expressed exasperation over delay in the beginning of construction of the Farakka barrage as the 6 years of “surprising procrastination, evasiveness, and

¹⁴India, Lok Sabha Secretariat, A Selection from Questions and Answers in the Lok Sabha (1952–57), Ministry of Transport, New Delhi. March 1957, question on 29/11/54, p. 9.

¹⁵Lok Sabha Debates (Part-I Questions and Answers), vol. IV 1955 (25th July to 20th August 1955) Tenth Session, New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi. Ibid, question on 17/8/55.

¹⁶“Congress-opposition battle of statistics,” *The Statesman*, 18/2/59.

¹⁷India, Lok Sabha Debates, “Demands for grants-Ministry of Irrigation and Power,” 3/4/56, SI, 3, col. 4185.

¹⁸Ibid., “Demand for grant-Ministry of Irrigation and Power,” 31/7/57. Col. 6180 etc.

¹⁹India, Lok Sabha, Debates, “Ganges Barrage Project (Discussion)” 19/11/58, S2, 22, pp. 589–644.

indecisiveness” since the project had been mooted in 1952. Two more West Bengal MPs delivered lengthy speeches with similar expressions of frustration. One of them, H.N. Mukherjee of Calcutta Central drew the house’s attention to the secrecy surrounding an expert report on the project.²⁰

In fact, in March 1959, all the MPs belonging to the Congress party representing constituencies of all north-east India, decided to use their combined influence to get the project sanctioned. The *Statesman* reported:

A meeting of Congress MPs called today to discuss the Calcutta Port problem came to the conclusion that top priority should be given to the Farakka barrage to enable big ships to continue to come to Calcutta Port. MPs from eastern Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Orissa, Manipur, Tripura, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands were present. Members expressed concern at the increasing salinity of the waters of the Bhagirathi River. It was felt that this problem and also the construction of the Sonu Bund and the Rihand Barrage should be examined in relation to the entire region. It was generally agreed that members should try to impress upon the government to take steps to ‘save’ Calcutta Port and to make efforts for proper utilisation of water resources for the region.²¹

The Bengal Chamber of Commerce was also very vocal in its demand for the Farakka project because their commercial interests were being badly affected. An analysis of the Calcutta port’s share in the foreign trade (excluding treasure) of India from 1870–1871 through 1946–1947 showed the important contribution made by this port to the Indian economy. The Calcutta port handled about 41.6–53.2 % of India’s export and about 39.0–47.4 % of its imports (both in terms value). In relative terms, gradually, the share of Calcutta port in total traffic handled by major ports of India declined from about 50 % in 1929–1930 to about 43 % in 1947–1948, 23 % in 1964–1965, 11 % in 1977–1978 and 10 % in 1988–1989.²² The decline of draught of Hooghly increased the cost of export and import through Calcutta Port. Therefore, it affected profits of commerce and industry heavily. Only smaller ships were able to visit the port because of the reduction in the draught when the economics of scale were demanding bigger ships. The Farakka Project was also supported because of positive externalities like providing a solution to the navigational problems of the lower Hooghly, improving condition of salinity of Calcutta’s water supply, provide year-round navigational facilities on the Bhagirathi and a rail and road bridge across the Ganges at a strategically useful point.

Moreover, quantity of cargoes handled by the Calcutta port was going down and down. In 1951, Calcutta was the biggest port handling 94 lakh tonnes a year against 75 lakh tonnes handled by Bombay, the second biggest port then. Later, other ports have got built up or expanded and modernised and are able to handle (and are handling) part of the cargo which passed through Calcutta previously. Before the two droughts and the war with Pakistan in 1964–1965, Bombay handled 189 lakh tonnes against Calcutta’s 109 lakh tonnes. Drought and Indo-Pak war in 1965 disrupted the economy. By 1968–1969, Calcutta was handling only 79 lakh tonnes of cargo while Mormugao was 88 lakh tonnes and Visakhapatnam 80 lakh tonnes.²³

²⁰Ben Crow & et al., p. 58.

²¹“MPs concern over port problem,” *The Statesman*, 18 March 1959.

²²Sau (1990), pp. 1015–26.

²³Ranjit Roy op. cit., p. 32.

In April 1960, even representatives of foreign shipping companies publicly expressed the view that if the deterioration continued for another 2 years the port of Calcutta would be lost. Apart from intensifying dredging services, the long-term solution, according to them, was laid in the supply of fresh water. Only way to achieve this was the early completion of the Ganges Barrage scheme.

Therefore, commercial interests were adding pressure on politicians, members of Parliament and West Bengal government to influence the Central government to go for construction of the Calcutta port. In fact, the Bengal Chambers representing interests of shippers made strong influence on the government. Even in 1833, it was pressure of the Bengal Chambers of Commerce that directed the government of Bengal to establish the Hooghly Commission. Again, during the 1950s, the same Chamber of Commerce was increasingly troubled by the deterioration of the Hooghly. Its president, Mr. J.D.K. Brown told the 1959 Annual General Meeting of the Chamber:

A matter which has gravely concerned shipping interests in particular and commerce and industry generally in this part of India throughout this past year has been the state of the River Hooghly. This is not entirely a local problem as it has all-India significance when we consider the portion of the export and import trade which passes through the Port of Calcutta ...it appears that unless something is done, and done as quickly as possible, the repercussions on the trade and industry of North East India and of India itself might be very severe.²⁴

All these demands were putting great pressure on the government. Apart from members of Parliament, the provincial government of West Bengal lobbied hard with the Central government for construction of the Farakka barrage. This can be illustrated with the citation of exchange of letters the West Bengal Chief Minister, Dr. B.C. Roy had with the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Dr. B.C. Roy wrote a letter to the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in March 1952 in which he underlined the need for construction of a barrage at the top of Murshidabad district so as to divert the water from other branches of the Ganges into the Bhagirathi and then into the Hooghly. "Calcutta port must be saved from being silted up by the saline water from the Bay of Bengal. Further, the banks of the river Hooghly are studded with a very large number of mills whose contribution to the wealth of the nation is not negligible". Further referring to the bridge-cum-barrage project at Farakka which was essential for the establishment of communications between the lower and southern parts of West Bengal, in the same letter he underlined: "Barrage at Farakka would keep the Hooghly alive, a factor on which depended the future trade and prosperity of the State".²⁵

The Chief Minister had been urging for the Ganges Barrage Project since 1954–1955 when the Second Five Year Plan was about to begin. Three letters were

²⁴Quoted in India (1961), p. 60.

²⁵Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 205–207.

exchanged between the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister. The central government was aware of the situation and intended to intensify the work at Farakka as early as possible. In his letter of the March 12, the Prime Minister gave a categorical assurance that Ganges Barrage scheme was “certainly being included in our plans”.²⁶

Further, in a letter dated March 8, 1960, the Chief Minister wrote to the Prime Minister Nehru about the benefit of having a barrage at Farakka:

I can only tell you that this scheme is essential not merely for the economy of the state itself but also for the safety of the Port of Calcutta which handles a very large quantity of goods for export and import purposes. It will save the city of Calcutta from extra salinity during the hot weather. Meanwhile it will help us to have balanced distribution of water in the Delta and to the different parts of West Bengal.²⁷

As discussed earlier, a number of committees were set up by the British as well as the Indian government after independence most of them were coming to the same conclusion of the construction of a barrage for improving the Calcutta port. By the end of 1960s, a consensus had emerged among the politicians, wider public and the businessmen about the urgency of the Farakka barrage. Expressing his frustration about setting up of number of committees to study the barrage possibility and inability to come with a clear cut decision resulting into further delay, the Chief Minister wrote,

Commissions have come and commissions have gone: enquiries have been made several times, perhaps ‘ad nanseam’. Now I understand that the Planning Commission is not satisfied with the results of various enquiries that have been made in the past and that they want to have another enquiry by another foreign expert. Meanwhile, what is happening is that the East Pakistan Government have already taken 8,000 cusecs of water from the Ganges for their Kobodak Scheme and they will very soon increase the amount of their intake by pumping water from the Ganges to Kobodak up to 20,000 cusecs. This means that we shall be lagging far behind... I can only tell you that this Scheme is essential not merely for the economy of the State itself but also for the safety of the Port of Calcutta which handles a very large quantity of goods for export and import purposes. It will save the city of Calcutta from extra salinity during the hot weather. Meanwhile, it will help us to have a balanced distribution of water in the Delta and to the different parts of West Bengal. I urge upon you to take this matter up seriously.²⁸

Amidst clamour for the Farakka barrage in India, Pakistan was demanding a ministerial level dialogue between India and Pakistan, Pt. Nehru replied

...it is always desirable, where interests conflict, like river interests or water interests, to discuss them and try to find a way which is satisfactory to both. Now, if this done at the officers level, the officers’ naturally, are tied down to certain, shall I say fixed policies as given down in the brief; there is no room to vary them. While ministers can find out these ways which are advantageous to both. But before all this is done, the facts must be known.

²⁶Saroj Chakraborty, op. cit., 444–445.

²⁷Nehru-Roy correspondence in Chakraborty, op. cit., pp. 444–47.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 446–447.

These are exceedingly complicated things. It is not a simple affair. When you go to any kind of a scheme of the river water or canal waters, it is frightfully complicated.²⁹

Thus, the decision to construct the Farakka barrage was taken after lots of investigation and political debates. Thus, West Bengal was really concerned about losing its shipping interests, most importantly navigation.³⁰ Since West Bengal already lost pride of place to Maharashtra and other Southern provinces in the industry and commerce; it was really particular to maintain its interests at any cost, so it became politically important for state government as well as political parties of the state to get the Farakka barrage completed as soon as possible. K.K. Framji, who had played an important role in the preparation for the project, referred to the Farakka completion as the “fulfilment of a dream”. He writes that “the Public Accounts Committee of the Lok Sabha wrote in 1976 that the dedication of the project was “for many in the country ... almost like a dream come true. Hopes long deferred now seemed near fulfilment”.³¹ As mentioned in the first chapter, Pakistan was attributing an evil design behind the construction of the Farakka barrage. The whole discussion underlines that it became impossible for the central government to delay the project any more. Amidst domestic demand for the Farakka construction, Pakistan’s internal problem began to spill over India.

People from East Pakistan began fleeing to India to avoid atrocities committed by the Pakistan army. There were almost seven million refugees from East Pakistan to Assam, Tripura and West Bengal causing massive demographic pressures on these states. Huge Indian resources were diverted for giving shelter to these people.³² Keeping large number of refugees in mind, a separate department was set up to deal with East Pakistan refugees.³³ Gradually, a strenuous pressure was being felt on exchequer because of influx of large number of population. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India made a statement to Parliament “On present estimates, the cost to the Central Exchequer on relief alone may exceed Rs. 180 crores for a period of 6 months. All this, as Hon. Members will appreciate, has imposed an unexpected burden on us”.³⁴ Indian involvement in Bangladesh’s independence positioned India in the domestic politics of the country post-independence period which will be discussed below.

²⁹Pt. Nehru replying on Farakka Barrage regarding whether ministerial meeting will affect Farakka barrage or not, Lok Sabha Debates Second Series, vol. LVI, August 7–19, 1961, Fourteenth Session, New Delhi, Lok Sabha Secretariat.

³⁰One of the major critics of this proposal was Kapil Bhattarya, an eminent engineer. He was categorically affirmed that it would be impossible to get 40,000 cusecs water during lean season. Thus the barrage will definitely fail in its promise of navigability.

³¹Quoted in Ben Crow and et al., op. cit., p. 63.

³²All these provinces of India share border with Bangladesh.

³³Dixit, (1999), p. 49.

³⁴Indira Gandhi (1972), p. 16.

2.3 India as a Factor in Bangladesh Politics

The Bangla Government in exile was formed and located in West Bengal in India. With the surrender of Pakistan army to Indian forces, Bangladesh became an independent nation-state in 1971.³⁵ With this, relationship between India and Bangladesh embarked on a new fervour and flavour. At first, the association was full of enthusiasm and hopes from each other. Mujib considered India to be the closest ally of Bangladesh. Provision of the Friendship Treaty confirmed Indo-Bangladesh special relationship. Article 8 of the treaty put a condition that Bangladesh should not enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against India. Another article, Article 9 committed the two parties to refrain from giving any assistance to any third party in armed conflict. In her speech at a public rally in Dhaka on March 17, 1972, Mrs. Gandhi tried to clear India's intentions to help Bangladesh liberation:

If India has helped you, it is because we could not sit idle after hearing your voice and after knowing of the sorrow and suffering that you have undergone. If we have helped you, it is in order to be true to ourselves, and to the principles to which we have adhered for years. I trust that, in the coming years, friendship between our two countries will be built not on the basis of the assistance that might have given to you now, but on the basis of the full equality and mutual benefit of two free and sovereign nations....If we offer you cooperation, it is not out of any desire to wield influence over you. We want you to stand on your own legs.³⁶

But this did not diminish the misgivings which had grown against India, among different groups of people which would be discussed shortly. Like Indian, Bangladesh became a secular state and all political parties with Islamic leanings were banned from the day the Awami League assumed the office in Dhaka. This ban did not resonate with people of Bangladesh and this was widely seen as an Indian ploy to retain its influence in Bangladesh. "Bengali Muslims had not been serious in stressing a Muslim identity in Pakistan politics, but they seemed more anxious to do so in secular Bangladesh!" Islamic identity became the rallying point of resistance against Indian predominance in Bangladesh politics. In the summer of 1973, the so-called Muslim Bengal movement was started by the right-wing Islamic forces to revive Muslim sentiment and to resist the secularism propounded by the ruling Awami League.³⁷

Maulana Bhashani, leader of a five-party United Front, opposed Mujib's Awami League government. Within a few months of Bangladesh's independence, the Maulana began open and bitter criticism of Indian influence in Bangladesh. He also criticised the Awami League's policy of secularism and gave tacit support to the "Muslim Bengal" movement by saying that within 6 months' time there would be a

³⁵For details on Indo-Pak war of 1971 and violence of 9 months by the Pakistan army see.

³⁶Speech of the Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi, at a public rally in Dhaka, 17 arch, 1972, Bhasin.

³⁷Rashiduzzaman (1977), p. 797.

“new flag” in Bangladesh, a euphemistic reference to the flag of Muslim Bengal. But this movement subsided gradually when several of its prominent leaders were arrested for clandestine activities. In December 1972, Bhashani called upon the Bangla government to repeal all pacts and treaties that Pakistan had signed with India before the 1970 election. In January 1973, he was further emboldened and claimed that some organisations in India were conspiring to integrate Bangladesh with India and demanded the resignation of the Awami League government and the formation of a National government. In July 1973, he was threatening to launch a jihad against India in the form of a boycott of Indian goods. Later when India detonated nuclear test explosion he characterised it as a “veiled threat to her smaller neighbours”, and a deviation from the path of non-violence.³⁸

Thus, Maulana Bhashani became the central figure of attraction for people who were against India and the Awami League government. The pro-Islamic forces began to rally around the octogenerian leader Maulana Bhashani, who professed socialism but was believer of Islamic principles. He began advocating Islamic socialism. As the law and order situation deteriorated after a devastating flood followed by widespread famine, the Awami League leaders began to blame the so-called pro-Pakistani elements and radicals for the secret killings and political violence in Bangladesh.

India was criticised that it did not withdraw troops from Bangladesh immediately after its liberation. But the discussion in Indian Parliament and general Indian government’s opinion were in favour of withdrawing troops from Bangladesh at the earliest. On being questioned that some countries are demanding that India should keep the armed forces in Bangladesh for some time, Mrs. Gandhi said in reply that

...it is right for the Indian army to move out as soon as it possibly can. Already quite a large number have come out and the others, I hope, will come out soon. As I said earlier, there was some fear about the non-Bengalis who are resident there, about their safety. But I think the Bangladesh Government is in full control of the situation.³⁹

On the issue of the cost of Indian army who were still stationed in Bangladesh, the Defence Minister replied that

in response to a request from the Bangladesh Government, a small detachment of the Indian Army deputed to assist the Bangladesh forces in carrying out anti-insurgency operations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts during the period March 15 to May 15, 1972. This detachment was withdrawn from Bangladesh by May 15, 1972. Since then no Defence Service personnel other than those employed in our High Commission in Dhaka are in Bangladesh. The cost has been borne by the Government of India.⁴⁰

³⁸Kodikara (1993), p. 134.

³⁹Speaking in the Press Conference in New Delhi, December 31, 1971 Retrospect and Prospect, in Indira Gandhi India and Bangladesh Selected Speeches and Statements March to December 1971, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972, p. 175.

⁴⁰Bhasin (1996), p. 46.

Whether India was interested or not to influence Bangladesh government and society, Indian shadow was writ large on all aspects of the emergent country because of long association.

The numerous government officials, teachers, students, politicians, and prominent individuals who had spent months in India during the 1971 liberation struggle were inclined to accept Indians in Bangladesh for various activities. In fact, they did not hesitate to raise the factor of Pakistani collaboration against those who did not agree with them. For a while, to some, patriotism was sarcastically linked with “pilgrimage” to India. The public reaction was quick. One Dhaka newspaper wrote in disgust that Bangladesh was a nation of 65 million collaborators (those who collaborated with Pakistan during liberation movement). The returnees from India were sarcastically called “Hajjis” by the critics of the Awami League government. The Indian presence was also conspicuous by the visits of various Indian high officials and distinguished private individuals to help the nascent state and cement friendship between the two countries.⁴¹

Bengalis were not in agreement about the nature of state that Bangladesh should adopt. The reason behind acrimonious relationship among these groups was that Bangladesh society was divided among various factions depending on their role in the liberation struggle: those who had fought the liberation war and, those who were confined to Dhaka and, the collaborators of the Pakistan army. Groups like Kader Bahini had independently fought the liberation war and its leaders such as Kader Siddiqui and Abu Taher had waged an armed struggle in areas like Tangail. These groups suspected that the Indian objective to help Bangladesh was to divide Pakistan and gain strategic and economic advantages from the emergence of Bangladesh. The presence of the Indian Army during the surrender ceremony of the defeated Pakistan army did not go down well with them especially when no senior officer of Bangladeshi forces was present.⁴² With these kinds of ideological streams prevailing, Indian role in Bangladesh’s liberation became contested; consequently, the bilateral relationship was coming under increasing public scrutiny and criticism.

There were widespread allegations in Bangladesh that officials in both countries were involved in smuggling relief supplies, jute, rice and fertiliser, and consumer goods. The persistent rumours was working to destroy whatever goodwill India had cultivated in Bangladesh and to undermine Mujib’s popularity. Tension escalated rapidly in early 1974 when several Bangladesh military officers claimed they had been dismissed because they had traced smuggling activities to Mujib’s family and friends.⁴³

⁴¹Rashiduzzaman, op. cit., p. 797.

⁴²Since war was fought between two sovereign nation-states, naturally Pakistan army would have surrendered to Indian army but somehow Indian army would have made even symbolically gesture of making Bangladeshi army feel important. In this see, J.N. Dixit, “War and the Birth of Bangladesh,” in *Liberation and Beyond*, op. cit, p. 109.

⁴³Franda, op. cit., p. 128.

Gradually, Mujib began to realise the importance of developing friendly relationship with Muslim countries. The Collaborators Act of 1972 was repealed, which gave some legitimacy to those Muslim leaders who were alleged to have been supportive of Pakistan in 1971. Mujib also accepted an invitation to attend the Islamic Conference which was held in Pakistan in 1974.⁴⁴

2.4 Mixing up Internal and External Relationship

2.4.1 *India Synonymous of Mujib Government*

India increasingly became synonymous of the Mujib government. Whatever omissions were committed by the Mujib regime, India was to be blamed as well.⁴⁵ So, India became an equal partner of all the wrongs in every stream of the Bangladesh government very soon.

2.4.1.1 Administrative Divisions

Bureaucracy in Bangladesh was divided between those officers who fled to India during the liberation struggle and were working closely with the provisional Government of Bangladesh and those who were in Pakistan. The Mujib government gave 2 years seniority in promotion to those officers who were closer to the exiled government in 1971, ignoring a principle of seniority. Many senior Bengali officers who stayed back or were detained in Pakistan until 1974 did not get high positions when they returned to Bangladesh. This raised frustrations in the upper sections of the bureaucracy and felt humiliated when they had to report to junior officers.⁴⁶ The discrimination against those who did not participate in the liberation struggle was restricted not only to civil services but also to other branches of government.

2.4.1.2 Military Division

Out of the Bengali soldiers who were in the Pakistan army, almost 15,000 of them defected to the freedom movement in 1971 which constituted the core of the Bangladesh liberation army. After liberation, the Bangladesh army was created with the help of those personnel and the Bengali officers who returned from Pakistan. Like the civil service, the military in Bangladesh was divided between the 'patriots' and the alleged collaborators. Many people who fought in the Mukti Bahini were

⁴⁴Rashiduzzaman, op. cit., p. 798.

⁴⁵Hassan (1989), pp. 44–61.

⁴⁶Rashiduzzaman, pp. 794–795.

absorbed in the army by Mujib as an inducement to surrender arms. They were disliked by soldiers who were already let down with restricted pay and reduction of other benefits in the new nation. Another factor which contributed to simmering tensions between the army and the civilian government was that the former seemed to believe that proper recognition has not been given to Army officers who fought the Pakistani forces from Bangladesh. In March 1971, when the Awami League had collapsed under the Pakistan army's crackdown, the formal declaration for complete independence was made by General Ziaur Rahman on behalf of Mujib from Chittagong Radio station. But Zia was not respected in a manner which deserved to a person who played a crucial role in the liberation struggle. Later, this kind of issue took an ugly turn in the competitive politics of Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Another issue was arms which many groups were keeping with them. Several thousand young freedom fighters, not belonging to trained cadres, possessed arms. This presented a challenge to the government. While Mujib appealed to these freedom fighters to surrender arms to government authorities in different parts of the country; public ceremonies were held for the surrender of arms by the Mukti Bahini, most of the guns went underground and most probably into the hands of the anti-social elements. These elements devastated the countryside with violent crimes.⁴⁷ Some suspected that arms from Bangladesh had gone into India because Mujibur Rahman's government failed to retrieve all the weapons and ammunition accumulated by private armies, political parties, and individuals during the liberation war of 1971. It is assumed that Mujib distrusted the army because most of the officers in Bangladesh army were trained in Pakistan and were associated with a military regime which was instrumental in suppression of the liberation struggle. The military is suspected to have been and remains 'anti-India' due to long-standing hard feelings over the last stages of the war, when "the Mukti Bahini alleged that their prowess was snatched when the Pakistan forces surrendered to Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora of the Indian army, the Mukti Bahini was not represented during the surrender ceremony, "independent Bangladesh inherited not only a politicised military but also an uneasy civil-military equation".⁴⁸

Mujib built his own Rakkhi Bahini (Security Force), trained by the Indian military. The military also resented the creation of the Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini (JRB), a paramilitary force, at a time when the military itself was being neglected. In January 1974, a law was passed giving the JRB special powers and legal protection. Thus, the military regarded the JRB as a parallel institution and a threat to its corporate interests. Mujib also created a number of armed political groups under the tutelage of, and loyal to, his family members and close associates. The principal groups were the Jubbo (Youth) League led by Sheikh Fazlul Huque Moni (Mujib's nephew); a number of private armies raised by heroes of the liberation war, the most prominent being the collection of Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighters) led by Kader

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 794.

⁴⁸Mohsin (2001), Franda (1975).

Siddiqui, the so-called “Tiger of Tangail”. Although in theory Jubbo League and private armies were affiliated to Mujib’s political party (the Bangladesh Krishak-Sramic Awami League, or BAKSHAL), most observers likened the bands of armed youth as Mujib’s private armed forces.

Opposition parties, of course, attempted to maintain their own armies. The result was a state of almost constant warfare in Bangladesh countryside, with opposition leaders and Awami League members being killed almost every day. Mujib estimated that in 1974 alone more than 3,000 of his supporters, including six members of Parliament, had been killed by ‘extremists’. Opposition parties vowed revenge when many of their top leaders were assassinated, allegedly by ‘Mujibadis’ (believers in ‘Mujibism’). Understandably, opposition leaders engaging in this form of guerrilla warfare frequently used India as a refuge. Moreover, they sought to establish contacts with those radical political parties in West Bengal that have for years been convinced of the need for using violence against the Indian government. Thus, radical opposition leaders got united against the governments of both countries.⁴⁹

Moreover, 9-month-long liberation war had thoroughly politicised the forces that were to form the nucleus of the Bangladesh military. The Mukti Bahini liberation force was composed of Bengali troops who had revolted against Pakistan as well as youths who were recruited later. These youths were highly motivated and politically charged. These troops formed the chain of command of the liberation forces and—as part of the former Pakistan military edifice—carried an anti-India psychosis with them. The Mukti Bahini therefore wanted to minimise the role of India, which had become a key factor in the liberation war; the Awami League leadership had not only taken refuge in India, but the provisional government of Bangladesh operated from the headquarters in West Bengal. The military leaders resented the reliance of the political leadership on India. Further, though the war strategy was prepared by the high command of Mukti Bahini, the Indian army was involved in training and arming the troops.

But conflict was not limited to different segments of the government only; tensions were prevailing among different sections of the Awami League also. There were groups like conservatives and radicals within the Awami League which did not get along and followed different paths. Tensions among these groups could be predated to the liberation war, which became severe during the war. Radicals accused the Awami League leaders in India of trying to prevent their entry into the Mukti Bahini (Liberation Army). These Awami League leaders raised questions

⁴⁹It is also understood that rebels and extremist forces of both India and Bangladesh were coming together and were in collusion. It was being believed by the Indian officials that these forces might be getting trained from Beijing though with no clear cut evidence. Gauging the seriousness of the matter, during Mujib’s New Delhi visit in 1974, Mrs. Gandhi and Mujibur Rahman agreed to establish a joint ministerial committee to explore ways to coordinate administrative and security forces on the border.

about Mujib Bahini becoming an important component of the Mukti Bahini. They alleged favouritism towards the Mujib Bahini (e.g. in the matter of weapons supply) which undoubtedly exacerbated antagonisms among freedom fighters. These divergences naturally spilled over into post-war Bangladesh.⁵⁰ In independent Bangladesh, a split occurred in the Awami League with the radicals forming the JSD (Jatiya Samajtantri Dal or Nationalist Socialist Party).

With tensions increasing among all sections of society, power gradually concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister and later into the President Mujib ur Rahman. This resulted into emergence of clout of family members of Mujib. “Lots of middlemen came between senior officers and the Prime Minister. So the senior officers have to wait longer to get to meet the Prime Minister”.⁵¹ Thus, strong resentment arose among senior officers against Mujib and his influential family members which undermined the unity of the military elite.

Haphazard Situation in Economy

Immediately after liberation, the cost of living jumped from taka (Bangladesh currency) 208 in January 1972 to taka 297 in October. The Mujib regime’s economic policies created multiple middlemen in the system. As licenced permit goods were sold and resold, naturally prices were going higher and higher. Before liberation it was expected that there would be mutually beneficial economic cooperation between India and Bangladesh. But after the liberation, the trade agreement and the border trade pact did not live up to people’s expectations. The high rates of smuggling further spoiled the economic relations between the two countries. (Because of the high rate of smuggling, trade through the regular channels was minimal. It was blamed that higher prices in Bangladesh were because of smuggling.) Finally, the Bangladesh army was sent to the border to tackle the smuggling problem, and the border trade pact was cancelled. As 1972 drew to a close, major problems in the economy front remained rising prices—especially food prices—labour unrest, multiplication of middlemen and heavy dependence on foreign aid.⁵²

Some permissions were granted to businessmen of West Bengal to establish contacts with the private sector in Bangladesh which was interpreted as parts of India’s negative and hidden agenda on Bangladesh. This criticism of India found expression in an undercurrent of propaganda against some members of Mujibur Rahman’s Cabinet who had been members of the Mujibnagar Government during the liberation war. Finance Minister Tajuddin Ahmed was a particular target of this criticism.⁵³

⁵⁰Ray (1986).

⁵¹Ibid., p. 802.

⁵²Rounaq (1972), pp. 208–209.

⁵³Dixit, op. cit., p. 176.

The rising prices of both manufactured goods and agricultural commodities in India after the liberation were bound to cause inflation in Bangladesh. To reduce the inflation effect, Mujib banned all private trade between India and Bangladesh. At the same time, however, he allowed his relatives to engage in private trade. As his position became the primary subject of scandal in Bangladesh, people of Bangladesh blamed both Mujib and India for their sufferings. By mid-1975, shortly after the coup, a number of Bengalis who had previously advocated close ties with New Delhi began to argue, in the words of a Dhaka University Professor, that “We would prefer the old argument with Pakistan to this arrangement with India”.⁵⁴

Controversy between India and Bangladesh was not limited to food prices only. India was criticised in other economic spheres as well. There was an acute shortage of basic clothing in Bangladesh. India agreed to export large number of *lungis* (a cloth worn around waist) and *Sarees* (worn by Women) to Bangladesh to compensate deficit of these items. But India was attacked for sending the sub-standard material to flood Bangladesh and for killing the “Dhaka *Saree* Manufacturing Industry”. Rumour spread about Indian malpractices in other fields too. In 1973, when there was a shortage of fish products, certain vernacular newspapers in Bangladesh indulged in the speculation that fishing authorities in West Bengal mixed some chemicals in lower reaches of the river system which flowed through West Bengal before joining the sea which affected the habitat of fishes.⁵⁵

International oil prices also affected Bangladesh. Economic conditions deteriorated in July and August 1974 when serious floods engulfed the country, followed by a cholera epidemic. By 1974 Bangladesh was in the grip of a full scale famine. During 1974 and 1975, the gross domestic product increased by 2 % while population grew by 3 %. The national economy suffered from low productivity, an excessive money supply, deficit financing and galloping inflation.⁵⁶ It is said that over 200,000 people died due to famine as the cost of living index went up between 400 and 500 %.⁵⁷

2.5 Assertiveness of Muslim Identity

2.5.1 *Complete Reversal*

Thus, the above discussion suggests that knowingly or inadvertently India became embedded in the politics of Bangladesh. It was made responsible either for problems of Bangladesh or criticised being associated with the policies of Mujib

⁵⁴Maniruzzaman 2003, p. 67.

⁵⁵Dixit (1973), p. 177.

⁵⁶Jalal (1995), pp 88.

⁵⁷Ahmed (2004), p. 211.

government. As discussed in the first chapter, Mujib and his close family members were assassinated by the military on August 15, 1975 in army coup. Coup brought complete changes in the principles of governance. Whatever the Mujib government professed for governance was reversed by the new regime to show assertiveness of the new government. Signals emanating from India also made it susceptible in the eyes of the new government. General Ziaur Rahman became military law administrator in November 1975 following coups, and then became a civilian president after winning election in April 1977. He formed a political party known as Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

Pakistan became the first nation to recognise the new regime and its Radio promptly made an announcement that the new government in Dhaka has changed the name of the country from “The People’s Republic of Bangladesh” to the “Islamic Republic of Bangladesh”. On the contrary, Indian government was unable to communicate to the new government for 3 days because telephone communications between New Delhi and Dhaka was cut off and the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh has come to Delhi for consultations. Even journalists in India were unable to go to Dhaka because air links had been suspended. Largely on the basis of speculation, they therefore tended to emphasise the post-coup possibilities for Indo-Bangladesh confrontation. It should be underlined that such speculations were encouraged by the rigid press censorship rules prevailing in India at the time because of the emergency.

When communications between India and Bangladesh were re-established on August 18, 1975, the new government tried to dispel New Delhi’s fears. The Foreign Ministry informed New Delhi that the name of the country had not been changed, and President Mushtaque Ahmed stated in official note to the Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka (communication to New Delhi by telephone) that Bangladesh would “honour all bilateral agreements and obligations”, including a 25-year Treaty of Friendship signed by Mujib. Then Mrs. Gandhi called on the Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi and expressed her wish for “success and prosperity to the people of Bangladesh”. Twelve days after the coup, India became the 39th nation to recognise the new regime. India was criticised for delaying recognition of the new government for several days after most other major nations—including the United States, Japan, Iran and the Soviet Union—had done so. In India, the Communist Party of India (CPI) proclaimed that Bangladesh coup was engineered by CIA.⁵⁸

By the proclamation of Order I of 1977, the phrase “*Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim*” (in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful”) was inserted at the beginning of the constitution before the Preamble. With the same proclamation, secularism as one of the state’s principle was replaced by assertion of absolute faith in the Almighty Allah. Article 12 which suggests banning communal political

⁵⁸Maniruzzaman, op. cit., p. 68.

parties in Bangladesh was also dropped. Article 9, which stressed the linguistic and cultural unity of Bengali nationalism, was likewise omitted. In place of 'Bengali', according new changes, citizens were now to be known as 'Bangladeshis'. These changes were given effect through the Fifth Amendment to the constitution on April 5, 1977. These measures helped Zia to consolidate his power base among the general public and the military. The division between Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalism, however, sowed seeds of discord within the Bangladesh polity. The emphasis of Bengali nationalism which was the basis of the Bangladesh liberation movement was on secularism, whereas Bangladeshi nationalism, though territorial and linguistic, had an overtly religious bias. Not only was the Bengali community divided along nationalist lines, but it also distinguished between the dominant Bengali Muslim community and other religious minorities. Thus, communal politics began to consolidate in Bangladesh.⁵⁹

When Parliamentary election was held in 1979, prominence was given to those men within the new BNP government who had previously been charged with, or convicted of, collaboration with Pakistan during the liberation war. In the 1979 election, more than 400 of the early 2,000 Parliamentary candidates were accused of or convicted of collaboration by Mujib's Awami League regime. Even those who were part of Zia government including three Ministers and four BNP candidates had previously been Ministers in Ayub or Yahya Khan's governments of the 1960s. More than three-fourths of the BNP's victorious MPs in 1979 were said by the Awami League leaders as collaborators including Shah Azizur Rahman, the man Zia appointed as his first Prime Minister after the death of Mashiur Rahman.⁶⁰

After coup, Hussain Muhammad Ershad occupied the power in 1982, he further expanded Zia's policies. Unlike Zia, he did not face any opposition from the military. By 1982, when Ershad took over power in a bloodless coup from the short-lived civilian government of Abdus Sattar, the military had been cleansed of its internal factionalism and had begun to claim a constitutional role for itself. Ershad formalised the entry of military officers into the foreign and civil service on the basis of a quota system. In the Foreign Service, 25 % of the posts were allocated to the armed services. The police forces, too, were brought under the military's influence. Indeed, Ershad literally inhabited the administration with military personnel including important bodies such as the National Economic Council, the Committee of Food, Agriculture, and Rural Development, the Energy and Mineral Resources Committee.

Ershad's policies to India was very similar to those of Zia's, except for a brief period which has been discussed in the previous chapter. But with the growing pressure internally from different political parties, Ershad used India card to divert public attention. These domestic undercurrents overlaid the negotiation strategies of

⁵⁹Franda, op. cit., p. 217.

⁶⁰Franda (1979), p. 230.

the Bangladesh government on the Ganges. Thus, attitudes of the negotiating teams were simply reflecting the political dictums of the ruling regimes.

2.5.2 *Farakka Discussion: Manoeuvring of Politics*

Thus it appears that the Ganges dispute can only be examined by taking into account many above discussed variables. The present section demonstrates how the Ganges issue evolved around the art of out manoeuvring the competitor in domestic political discourse. This section heavily draws on documentations of Indian Parliamentary proceedings to highlight the Indian understanding of the issue and the method to resolve it. Interestingly, in the beginning Awami League did not attribute bad intentions to India for the Farakka barrage; even its 1970 election manifesto did not mention it in poor light:

The criminal neglect of earlier governments has allowed Farakka Barrage to become a fait accompli resulting in grave and permanent damage to the economy of East Pakistan. Every instrument of foreign policy must be immediately utilized to secure a just solution to this problem.⁶¹

Later after independence, there was a difference of opinion among members of the government about how to deal with India about Farakka. While speaking to the press, Khondaker Moshtaque suggested that he told Parliament in 1972 that Farakka was a national problem. He continued further that he lost his portfolio of the Minister for Water Resources and Flood Control when he had differed on the Farakka issue with the government handling in 1973 and 1974. Contrarily, it has also been suggested that Moshtaque was prolonging the dispute to further his own political career. This was the thesis of Enayatullah Khan (who was editor of the weekly *Holiday* in 1974 and later became Bangladesh Petroleum Minister in 1978):

(Moshtaque) was not a hardliner. He was trying to make it big with the issue, trying to make his career out of it. He had almost capitalised on it. ...The tussle between Mujib and Moshtaque was not ideological. There was a potential rivalry. Only two people could historically have challenged Mujib: Tajuddin Ahmed (Finance Minister and leader of the Government- in – exile)...and Moshtaque was the leader of the right-wing faction within Mujib's cabinet. In August 1975, if not earlier, he gave support to the group of majors who staged the coup d'état in which Mujib and many of his family were killed. For 3 months in 1975 Moshtaque was President of Bangladesh, but in November he was overthrown and later jailed for corruption.⁶²

⁶¹Quoted Bangladesh Documents in Ben Crow, et al., "Co-operation and Agreement: 1971–1977," in, p. 102.

⁶²Ibid., p. 104.

Towards the late 1974 when Mujib regime was losing popularity for number of reasons, various political leaders were interested to detach themselves from his policies as it happens to politics of any other country. This could be part of distancing from 'unpopular' government and its policies.

At the end of April 1975, Bangladesh's peasant leader, Moulana Bhashani "called on India to dismantle the Farakka Dam... and threatened to organise a protest march of one million people". Bhashani carried out his threat 10 days after the end of the augmentation talks with India. Estimates of the size of the march ranged from one hundred thousand to half a million people. The Indian government prepared for violence and border violations, but the march stopped 6 miles short of the border.

One of the casualties of the coup and counter coups was that during the 1974 accord, when India commissioned the project, both sides had set up three joint teams to observe the effects of the experimental diversions. These three teams began measuring what was happening during the 40 days but joint teams were not successful to submit their joint findings because of disagreement among themselves. In 1977, it was agreed that the JRC should be upgraded to include the relevant ministers from each government. Thus, the JRC was transformed from an official-level forum dominated by technical experts into a political and technical commission. This upgradation of JRC underlines the fact that both governments (Janata government in India and Zia government in Bangladesh) realised that river water was too important an issue to be managed by the bureaucrats only.

When the Janata government struck the agreement with Bangladesh, the Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram also consulted West Bengal government because the immediate affected party in India was West Bengal which needed to be informed about any decision regarding Farakka barrage. The Minister, Ram, visited Calcutta at the end of August 1977 to apprise of West Bengal of the new developments.⁶³ Making an argument about important role of states which need to be taken into account by the central government, Member of Parliament remarked

... in our border settlement with Bangladesh are we not keeping the Government of West Bengal constantly in the picture? They are always in the picture and they are a necessary participant in these talks and we are keeping them in the picture. Therefore, there is no question of any State Government being kept out. After all, India consists of States and Union Territories but the question is the people in that area who are immediately affected and their State Governments would certainly come into the picture.⁶⁴

⁶³G.K. Reddy, 30/9/77, *The Hindu* 'Agreement on Farakka', and 'Farakka: Dhaka summons Abbas for fresh briefing,' the Hindu, 28/9/77.

⁶⁴Demands for Grants, VI/23 Lok Sabha, 9 July 1980.

The news of the 1977 Farakka Agreement had invited strong reactions from Members of Parliament particularly from those belonging to West Bengal. One of the members expressed concern in the following words:

...The newspapers have been reporting that India might have agreed to cut down during the lean months the upland flow from the Ganges to less than 20,000 cusecs and this has caused serious concern in Calcutta. Such curtailment to upland supplies to the Hooghly to 50 % of its minimum requirements will, according to the experts, far from effecting a steady improvement of the river, sound the death knell of the Calcutta port. And similar misgivings are being voiced by the people in Bihar. In fact, somebody has pointed out that if this kind of an agreement goes through, then the very purpose of having the Farakka barrage is frustrated and stultified.⁶⁵

Replying to this, the Minister of Defence (Shri Jagjivan Ram) said

We will resolve our differences, a few cusecs on this side and a few cusecs on that. But what I think is that friendship with the neighbouring countries is of much more value than that. ... My handicap, Sir, is that he has disclosed some figures. Well, opposition does not always mean irresponsibility, especially in matters where the issues are national, where the issues do not even belong to one party or the other. I had the good fortune of negotiating on behalf of the Congress Government and I have the good fortune of negotiating on behalf of the Janata party Government also and I have always held that the Farakka issue is not a party question, but it is a national question and it should be viewed in that light and not as a party question. water is not adequate to meet the requirements of both the countries. Therefore, we will have to share shortages. When we are sharing shortages, certainly there will be discontentment on this side and there will be discontentment on that side as well. But we have to face our people and explain to them the circumstances under which we have accepted the quantity which is not adequate to meet their requirements and they in Bangladesh will have similarity to explain to their people why they have accepted a quantity which is not adequate to meet their requirements. Their difficulty will be more than ours because up till now, even at the time of the minimum flow, they were receiving 100 % water that flow below the Farakka. Now they will be receiving only a percentage of that. We will have to explain to our people that *in the interest of friendly relations between the two countries, we had to agree to share shortages in a manner which can be regarded as friendly.*⁶⁶ (emphasis mine)

Thus, the Janata government had to face tough time justifying to agree for a high quantity, which was not high according to Bangladesh expectations but quite high from the recommended quantity for desiltation of the Calcutta port. One of the members in Rajya Sabha made a long statement regarding potential impact being felt by Calcutta as fall out of the new agreed principles.

... I do not know whether you have taken any steps—we expected that there would be some statement kept on the Table of the House—to try to investigate that if the flow of the water is diminished, what will be the effect on the Calcutta port. As it is, we are told that there is

⁶⁵Member of Rajya Sabha, VP. Dutt expressed his concern on the debate on the Working of the Ministry of External Affairs, Rajya Sabha C11/17 9th August 1977. pp 76–77.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 105.

112 million tonnes of silt in the Hooghly. The world experts had told us that if there was a flow of 40,000 cusecs at least, then there would be 8 % of desilting annually and in the course of 12 years, on that basis, it would be possible to clear the silt that had already deposited and ships of bigger draught would be able to come to Calcutta, as they did 15 or 20 years back. Now the situation is that if you reduce the flow of water to anything below 35,000 cusecs, there will be a deposit of 2–8 % silt annually, with the result that there can be no question of its clearance in about 10 years. Then the Calcutta port will be doomed, destroyed and ruined for ever. And you are going to enter into an agreement on the dangling of carrots on more hopes. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are the States which gave the Janata Party hundred per cent seats in Parliament. This is how you are going to treat those people in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Our people there stand cheated, 92 cheated, cheated. On this assurance, you are going to destroy the destiny of those people for ever. This is the basis of the whole agreement. We are fortunate and happy that agreement has not taken place and I hope that in the days to come, Sir, good sense will prevail and you will go, back on that position and see that the interests—not only of the Calcutta port but of the Gangetic valley—will be protected and preserved. Now, this Farakka question is not only one of sharing of water. It is one of political relations with our neighbouring country as well. The foreign policy of the Government has also to see how far we succeed in having friendly relations with our immediate neighbours.⁶⁷

It was being felt that India is sacrificing its interests in the name of friendly relations:

After all what are the reasons done to which despite our good intentions, feelings and efforts, we have not been able to establish good relations with our neighbouring countries. I feel that the reasons is that some of the government in our neighbouring countries have not been elected by the people. Today, there are military governments in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma. In Sri Lanka also, there is an indirect military rule. It is a fact of history that the military rulers have sought to perpetuate their rule by creating feelings of hatred towards their neighbouring countries or other countries. In Pakistan the military rulers always used hatred towards India as a means to perpetuate their rule. Bangladesh followed suit and the military rulers there want to continue in power by creating the psychology of fear and hatred towards India. In my opinion, we would have to take a two-pronged action in respect of our relations with the neighbouring countries. Firstly, we would have to maintain relations with the people there. Whenever there were democratic governments in these countries, we had friendly relations with them. When there was Mujibur Rahman Government in Bangladesh, when there was a popular government there, our relations with Bangladesh were very friendly. But with the emergence of military rule there, our relations stated deteriorating. Hence, I feel that we would have to establish good relations with the people of our neighbouring countries. It becomes essential for our Government and the people to give moral support to these struggles because so long as these military rules continue, our relations cannot improve with our neighbouring countries, particularly with Bangladesh and Pakistan. When popular governments are restored there, I am fully confident that our relations would improve. With Pakistan and Bangladesh we have got historical relations, blood relations and cultural relations. Only the military dictators have kept us apart. We are all one and we all want to live in peace.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Discussion on the Working of the Ministry of External Affairs, Rajya Sabha C11/17 9th August 1977, pp. 103–104.

⁶⁸Member of Parliament, Shri Zainul Basher, Demands for Grants (General), 1985–1986, 8th series III/20 10th April 1985, p. 389.

As explained in the previous chapter, the Ganges Agreement was not renewed further after 1982, Member of Parliament welcomed the decision in the following words:

Now I can only say this much that I am glad that the present Government has at least done, if nothing else, they have managed to get out of that agreement.... They have not been able to negotiate a new agreement. That is true. But they have got out of that agreement and Bangladesh was demanding that there should be a further 5 year extension of the same agreement which the Government of India has refused to enter into. Now there will be some ad hoc year to year agreement perhaps. But at least it is better than what we were trapped in-that five year agreement which the Janata Government has signed.

The Minister of External Affairs justified his government position regarding the Farakka Agreement:

Here is a problem and we are greatly concerned because it is not only Calcutta port, but much more that is at stake, U.P is at stake and the entire area which prospectively would have got water from the Ganges and its basin. So, it is not an easy matter for us. We cannot take it lightly and at the same time we know that even Bangladesh cannot take it lightly. Therefore, it will be a test of political will; it will be a test of statesmanship and I am not able to presently envisage a right answer to the question, a right solution, for various reasons, this is the position and therefore we will have to be patient, we will have to be imaginative and we will have to go on with the effort.⁶⁹

Thus above Parliamentary discussions suggest that the sheer desire of the Janata regime to maintain good neighbourly relationship pushed it to have an agreement with Bangladesh. It was driven by calculations of domestic politics to portray an image of friendly regime to its domestic constituency and outside world. But the achievement lies to the fact that at least a negotiation was concluded for 5 years term which was precursor of the 1996 treaty. From Bangladesh political perspective also, when the Awami League decided to negotiate with India on Farakka, it had a reference to make the treaty politically palatable in fierce competitive politics.

Later, the positive development took place during Rajiv Gandhi and General Ershad regime in late 1980s, but domestic political calculations could not let them shape the final result. The Rajiv Gandhi government was occupied to send Indian troops to Sri Lanka, and other issues like the Bofors affair and the crisis in Punjab. Relations between the two governments also deteriorated on account of other factors. Migration of tens of thousands of Chakma refugees from the Hill tracts of Bangladesh into India dominated discussions between the two governments from the early months of 1987. The Chakma migrations, responding to a wave of Bengali settlement supported by army action in the Bangladesh Hill Tracts led to new rounds of accusations between the two foreign ministries. Other issues like Indian soldiers killing Bangladesh civilians and soldiers at the border dominated the

⁶⁹31 March, 1981.

Indo-Bangladesh relationship.⁷⁰ Thus, golden opportunity (the new proposal was discussed in the first chapter) to resolve the Ganges river water issue was lost due to domestic political compulsions of both governments.

In 1996, when India and Bangladesh signed the long-term treaty on the Ganges, response of the national parties was different from that of the regional arm. Since late Jyoti Basu was an important architect of the treaty, his party supported it. Though Indian National Congress supported the treaty at the national level in the Indian Parliament, the BJP and the Congress MPs from West Bengal criticised it as a 'sell out' to Bangladesh as it failed to protect the interests of the Calcutta port.⁷¹ Thus the Ganges has been a playground for manoeuvring by politicians against each other for the battle of gaining loyalty of domestic constituency.

2.6 Conclusion

The above discussion suggests that India became closely associated with the Awami League government. This led to a rupture even though briefly between new Bangladesh government and old Indian government of the Congress party after assassination of Mujib. But the change of government in India presented an opportunity to refresh and refashion the relationship. Political expediency pushed change in policy direction of the Desai government in 1977 which paved the way for peaceful interregnum in the stalemate. The above analysis also underlines that the construction of the Farakka was not an intemperate decision by the Indian government with an evil design to harm the neighbour. A number of committees examined the various options of increasing draught of the river before a final call was taken on the Farakka barrage. The repeated demands by West Bengal government and members of parliament forced the central government to go ahead with the project. What emerged out of the Ganges river dispute is that the water issue between neighbours cannot be resolved by taking it as a technical issue of river water sharing because any controversy also reflects social, cultural and historical underpinnings. Potential for manoeuvre becomes high in the domestic politics where history has been fractious. India and Bangladesh negotiated several times before signing a treaty for 30 years. There has always been tussle between India and Bangladesh about preferred way of negotiation-bilateralism or multilateralism. The rationale for preference to a particular way of resolution of river dispute is the subject of next chapter.

⁷⁰Crow and et al., op. cit., p. 207.

⁷¹Banerji (1999), p. 44.

Annexure

No. 16210

**BANGLADESH
and
INDIA**

**Agreement on sharing of the Ganges waters at Farakka and
on augmenting its flows (with schedule). Signed at Dacca
on 5 November 1977**

Authentic texts: Bengali, Hindi and English.

Registered by Bangladesh on 12 January 1978.

**BANGLADESH
et
INDE**

**Accord relatif au partage des eaux du Gange à Farakka et à
l'augmentation de son débit (avec annexe). Signé à
Dacca le 5 novembre 1977**

Textes authentiques : bengali, hindi et anglais.

Enregistré par le Bangladesh le 12 janvier 1978.

AGREEMENT¹ BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S
REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH AND THE GOVERNMENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA ON SHARING OF THE GANGES
WATERS AT FARAKKA AND ON AUGMENTING ITS FLOWS

The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Government of the Republic of India,

Determined to promote and strengthen their relations of friendship and good neighbourliness,

Inspired by the common desire of promoting the well-being of their peoples,

Being desirous of sharing by mutual agreement the waters of the international rivers flowing through the territories of the two countries and of making the optimum utilisation of the water resources of their region by joint efforts,

Recognising that the need of making an interim arrangement for sharing of the Ganges waters at Farakka in a spirit of mutual accommodation and the need for a solution of the long-term problem of augmenting the flows of the Ganges are in the mutual interests of the peoples of the two countries,

Being desirous of finding a fair solution of the question before them, without affecting the rights and entitlements of either country other than those covered by this Agreement, or establishing any general principles of law or precedent,

Have agreed as follows:

A. ARRANGEMENTS FOR SHARING OF THE WATERS
OF THE GANGES AT FARAKKA

Article I. The quantum of waters agreed to be released by India to Bangladesh will be at Farakka.

Article II. (i) The sharing between Bangladesh and India of the Ganges waters at Farakka from the 1st January to the 31st May every year will be with reference to the quantum shown in column 2 of the Schedule annexed hereto which is based on 75 percent availability calculated from the recorded flows of the Ganges at Farakka from 1948 to 1973.

(ii) India shall release to Bangladesh waters by 10-day periods in quantum shown in column 4 of the Schedule:

- provided that if the actual availability at Farakka of the Ganges waters during a 10-day period is higher or lower than the quantum shown in column 2 of the Schedule it shall be shared in the proportion applicable to that period;
- provided further that if during a particular 10-day period, the Ganges flows at Farakka come down to such a level that the share of Bangladesh is lower than 80 percent of the value shown in column 4, the release of waters to Bangladesh during that 10-day period shall not fall below 80 percent of the value shown in column 4.

¹ Came into force on 5 November 1977 by signature, in accordance with article XV.

Article III. The waters released to Bangladesh at Farakka under article I shall not be reduced below Farakka except for reasonable uses of waters, not exceeding 200 cusecs, by India between Farakka and the point on the Ganges where both its banks are in Bangladesh.

Article IV. A Committee consisting of the representatives nominated by the two Governments (hereinafter called the Joint Committee) shall be constituted. The Joint Committee shall set up suitable teams at Farakka and Hardinge Bridge to observe and record at Farakka the daily flows below Farakka Barrage and in the Feeder Canal, as well as at Hardinge Bridge.

Article V. The Joint Committee shall decide its own procedure and method of functioning.

Article VI. The Joint Committee shall submit to the two Governments all data collected by it and shall also submit a yearly report to both the Governments.

Article VII. The Joint Committee shall be responsible for implementing the arrangements contained in this part of the Agreement and examining any difficulty arising out of the implementation of the above arrangements and of the operation of Farakka Barrage. Any difference or dispute arising in this regard, if not resolved by the Joint Committee, shall be referred to a panel of an equal number of Bangladeshi and Indian experts nominated by the two Governments. If the difference or dispute still remains unresolved, it shall be referred to the two Governments which shall meet urgently at the appropriate level to resolve it by mutual discussion and failing that by such other arrangements as they may mutually agree upon.

B. LONG-TERM ARRANGEMENTS

Article VIII. The two Governments recognise the need to cooperate with each other in finding a solution to the long-term problem of augmenting the flows of the Ganges during the dry season.

Article IX. The Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission established by the two Governments in 1972 shall carry out investigation and study of schemes relating to the augmentation of the dry season flows of the Ganges, proposed or to be proposed by either Government with a view to finding a solution which is economical and feasible. It shall submit its recommendations to the two Governments within a period of three years.

Article X. The two Governments shall consider and agree upon a scheme or schemes, taking into account the recommendations of the Joint Rivers Commission, and take necessary measures to implement it or them as speedily as possible.

Article XI. Any difficulty, difference or dispute arising from or with regard to this part of the Agreement, if not resolved by the Joint Rivers Commission, shall be referred to the two Governments which shall meet urgently at the appropriate level to resolve it by mutual discussion.

C. REVIEW AND DURATION

Article XII. The provisions of this Agreement will be implemented by both Parties in good faith. During the period for which the Agreement continues to be

in force in accordance with article XV of the Agreement, the quantum of waters agreed to be released to Bangladesh at Farakka in accordance with this Agreement shall not be reduced.

Article XIII. The Agreement will be reviewed by the two Governments at the expiry of three years from the date of coming into force of this Agreement. Further reviews shall take place six months before the expiry of this Agreement or as may be agreed upon between the two Governments.

Article XIV. The review or reviews referred to in article XIII shall entail consideration of the working, impact, implementation and progress of the arrangements contained in parts A and B of this Agreement.

Article XV. This Agreement shall enter into force upon signature and shall remain in force for a period of 5 years from the date of its coming into force. It may be extended further for a specified period by mutual agreement in the light of the review or reviews referred to in article XIII.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned, being duly authorised thereto by the respective Governments, have signed this Agreement.

DONE in duplicate at Dacca on the 5th November 1977 in the Bengali, Hindi and English languages. In the event of any conflict between the texts, the English text shall prevail.

Rear Admiral
MUSHARRAF HUSAIN KHAN
Chief of Naval Staff and Member,
President's Council of Advisers in
charge of the Ministry of Communica-
tions, Flood Control, Water Re-
sources and Power, Government of
the People's Republic of Bangladesh
For the Government
of the People's Republic
of Bangladesh

SURJIT SINGH BARNALA
Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation,
Government of the Republic of India

For the Government
of the Republic of India

SCHEDULE
(vide article II (i))

**SHARING OF WATERS AT FARAKKA BETWEEN THE 1st JANUARY
AND THE 31st MAY EVERY YEAR**

1	2	3	4
<i>Period</i>	<i>Flow reaching Farakka (based on 75% availability from observed data (1948-73))</i>	<i>Withdrawal by India at Farakka</i>	<i>Release to Bangladesh</i>
	<i>Cusecs</i>	<i>Cusecs</i>	<i>Cusecs</i>
January			
1-10	98,500	40,000	58,500
11-20	89,750	38,500	51,250
21-31	82,500	35,000	47,500
February			
1-10	79,250	33,000	46,250
11-20	74,000	31,500	42,500
21-28/29	70,000	30,750	39,250
March			
1-10	65,250	26,750	38,500
11-20	63,500	25,500	38,000
21-31	61,000	25,000	36,000
April			
1-10	59,000	24,000	35,000
11-20	55,500	20,750	34,750
21-30	55,000	20,500	34,500
May			
1-10	56,500	21,500	35,000
11-20	59,250	24,000	35,250
21-31	65,500	26,750	38,750

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