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Bangladesh-India Relations: Sheikh Hasina's India-positive Policy Approach

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ABSTRACT

After becoming prime minister for the second time in January 2009, Sheikh Hasina radically overhauled Bangladesh's foreign policy approach toward India and brought Dhaka much closer to New Delhi. Consequently, Bangladesh-India bilateral relationship has improved significantly in the past four years. The intriguing question is, why did Sheikh Hasina adopt an India-positive foreign policy orientation? This paper examines Bangladesh-India relations and provides an in-depth analysis of the sources of Sheikh Hasina's India-positive foreign policy approach. Borrowing from International Relations theoretical literature, the paper looks at three levels - personal, unit/nation, and regional/international - as sources of Hasina government's India policy. It concludes that no particular factor or level is adequate to explain the foreign policy behaviour of the Hasina government. A heuristic approach needs to be adopted to explain various components of Sheikh Hasina's policy approach toward New Delhi.

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Bangladesh-India Relations: Sheikh Hasina's India-positive policy approach

AS BANGLADESH'S closest neighbour, India has been a dominant factor in the country's foreign policy (as well as in domestic politics) ever since Bangladesh emerged as an independent state in 1971.[1] Dhaka's perception of India, and consequently its approach toward that country, has varied over time and under different governments: sometimes perceived as a positive factor, it has, at other times, been viewed as a key source of a threat to security. Variations in perception have produced changing patterns of Bangladesh-India relations in the past four decades. The three Awami League (AL) governments (1971-1975, 1996-2001, 2009- to date) have viewed India positively and pursued a positive foreign policy approach toward that country, while the non-AL governments - military regimes or nationalist-led - invariably perceived, albeit in varying degrees, the country's biggest neighbour primarily as a source of insecurity.[2]

This study analyses Bangladesh's foreign policy approach toward India during 2009-2012, the second tenure of Sheikh Hasina as prime minister of Bangladesh.[3] During this period, Hasina initiated a radical departure in Dhaka's approach towards New Delhi, adopting a very India-positive foreign policy orientation in order to build a long-term, irreversible bilateral relationship. New Delhi also responded positively to Dhaka's initiative. Consequently, the Bangladesh-India relationship has been on an upward trajectory in the past three years, a trend that has been hardly visible since 1975. What prompted Bangladeshi political elites, particularly Sheikh Hasina, to adopt such a foreign policy approach towards India?

Critics point out that it is natural for an AL government, given the ideological similarity between itself and the Indian National Congress, to pursue a decidedly pro-India policy and get closer to New Delhi. The underlying causes of the Hasina government's India-positive foreign policy orientation, however, run deeper. The Hasina government's departure from Bangladesh's past India policy is not the result of just the AL's ideological stance;

[1] For an analysis of the 'India factor' in Bangladesh foreign policy making, see Shaukat Hassan, 'The India Factor in the Foreign Policy of Bangladesh,' in M.G. Kabir and Shaukat Hassan, eds., *Issues and Challenges Facing Bangladesh Foreign Policy* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Society of International Studies, 1989), pp. 44-61; Emajuddin Ahmed, ed., *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: A Small State's Imperative* (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1984).; Kirti Singh Chauhan, *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Kaveri Books, 2012).

[2] New Delhi also viewed the non-AL governments in Bangladesh in a similar fashion, that is, primarily through the lens of security. On this, see Smruti S. Pattanaik, 'India's Neighbourhood Policy: Perceptions from Bangladesh,' *Stra0tegic Analysis*, vol. 35, no. 1 (January 2011), pp. 71-87.

[3] In her first tenure, Sheikh Hasina was prime minister of Bangladesh from 1996-2001.

rather, it is a consequence of multiple interactive variables emanating from three sources – personal, national and regional/international.

This paper engages foreign policy theoretical debates to evaluate Bangladesh's foreign policy behaviour toward India. Three broad schools of thought are analysed to address the issue. First, the *Innenpolitik* school argues that domestic factors are primarily responsible for states' foreign policy behaviour. In contrast, the *Aussenpolitik* school emphasises the *Primat der Aussenpolitik* - 'the primacy of foreign policy'– in states' international behaviour.[4] Third, the Integrative perspective attempts to synthesise the opposing perspectives of the two schools. Which school best explains Sheikh Hasina's India policy?

The paper is organised in five sections. First, it provides a brief discussion on theoretical issues relating to sources of states' foreign policy behaviour and the debate surrounding it. In the second section, the paper examines the historical evolution of Dhaka's India policy and the changing patterns of Bangladesh-India relations from 1971-2008. The third section explores the second Sheikh Hasina government's India approach and how the relationship has evolved in the past three years. The fourth section analyses the sources and drivers of the Hasina government's India policy. The final section evaluates the theoretical claims of the three schools in light of the findings of the paper.

Sources of State Foreign Policy Behaviour: Theoretical Perspectives

Why do states behave in the way they do in international relations? What are the sources and drivers of their behaviour? Some scholars argue that domestic variables determine a state's international behaviour, while others emphasise the external environment to explain the same phenomenon. These views are represented by the *Innenpolitik* and the *Aussenpolitik* schools of thought, respectively, which have traditionally dominated the theoretical debate on the issue. Yet, some scholars argue that while both schools are right in highlighting internal and external variables in explaining the foreign policy behaviour of a state, they are wrong in highlighting one over the other. A synthesis of both sets of variables, they posit, is required for a complete understanding of a state's foreign policy behaviour.

Innenpolitik School

[4] Two arguments characterise the *Aussenpolitik* school. The first is that the patterns of international relations strongly influence domestic arrangements of states. The second meaning is that states conduct their foreign policy as a consequence of international pulls and pushes, and not to advance domestic ends. For a brief, but candid, discussion on the origins of these two schools of thought, see Zakaria, 'Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay,' *International Security*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Summer 1992), pp, 177-198.

Scholars of the *Innenpolitik* school of thought argue that a state's foreign policy is determined by the forces and pressures of domestic politics. Although scholars within this school emphasise different domestic variables, such as political and economic ideology, national character, partisan politics, socio-economic condition, state institutions, the existence and strength of interest groups, bureaucratic politics, the preferences and configurations of domestic actors etc., yet they all share a common assumption that a country's foreign policy is driven by internal political factors. The roots of foreign policy of a state, therefore, must be located in the social, economic and political structures of states and their configurations and dynamics.[5]

The *Innenpolitik* school has a long historical pedigree. Its roots can be traced as far back as Plato. Over the centuries, many scholars have viewed that domestic politics determine external politics rather than the other way round and this *Innenpolitik* view has been the key source of criticism against realism. For example, Marxists and Liberals in critiquing realism have unambiguously contended that the causes of international conflict often lie within the state - its socio-political and economic structures.[6] Even during the Cold War, when structural realism was dominant, the *Innenpolitiker* made the argument that domestic politics must be included for a complete account of foreign policy.[7] This trend became more pronounced after the end of the Cold War. A group of scholars within the realist tradition has become disillusioned with neo-realism's overemphasis on structural sources of state behaviour and are calling for, as discussed below, bringing unit level analysis back within realist theory.[8]

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[5] For a discussion on *Innenpolitik* perspective, see Gideon Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy', a review article, *World Politics*, vol. 51, no. 1 (1998), pp. 144-172; James Fearon, 'Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy and Theories of International Relations, *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 1 (June 1998), pp. 289-313; Eugene Wittkope and James McCormick, eds., *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidences* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

[6] For a Marxist argument, see V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1916, reprint 1939). On the liberal argument, particularly contextualising the Democratic Peace theory, see Michael E. Brown, *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996).

[7] For example, Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Between Power and Plenty: The Foreign Economic Policies of Advanced Industrial States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); Michael Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs: Part 1 and Part II,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 12, nos 3 and 4 (Summer, Fall, 1983), pp. 205-235; 323-353, etc.

[8] See, for example, Fareed Zakaria, 'Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay,' *International* Security, pp. 177-198; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Jack S. Levy, 'Domestic Politics and War,' *Journal of International History*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 653-673.

Aussenpolitik School

During the Cold War period, structural realism emerged as a dominant theory of International Relations,[9] which represented an extreme version of the *Aussenpolitik* school of thought. Offensive realism, a variant of structural realism, argues that systemic pressure is the key determinant of state behaviour in an anarchic international system. Scholars of this variant of structural realism view the international system as 'Hobbesian' in which security is 'scarce' and hence states, as rational egoists, are forced to maximise their relative power position in the system. The key consequence of such anarchy in the international environment is that it is very likely that inter-state conflict will occur. Hence, foreign policy is driven by state motivation to enhance its relative power position in the system for security, and systemic pressures and opportunities are the key determinants of states' international actions. This means, contrary to the position of the *Innenpolitik* school, differences in internal characteristics of countries are relatively unimportant compared to systemic pressures and, regardless of domestic characteristics, similarly situated states will behave similarly.[10]

Defensive realism, in contrast to offensive realism, has a softer view about anarchy and its impact on state behaviour. Scholars of this brand of structural realism posit that the international system is less 'Hobbesian' and provides incentives only for moderate and reasonable behaviour, and that security is not 'scarce', but 'plentiful'.[11] State behaviour is not motivated primarily by aggressive power maximisation, and a state responds *only* to existing real threats instead of hypothetical ones. Some situations, of course, may lead security seekers to fear each other, but such situations are not common. Therefore, an aggressive

[9] Kenneth Waltz is the key scholar who popularized structural realism. See his work, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

[10] Some key works on offensive realism include, John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001); Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War,' *International Security*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 5-56; Eric J. Labs, 'Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims,' *Security Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (December 1997), pp. 1-49; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[11] Key proponents of defensive realism include: Stephen Van Evera 'The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War,' *International Security*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Summer 1984), pp. 58-108; Van Evera, 'Why Cooperation Failed in 1914,' *World Politics*, vol. 38, no. 1 (October 1985), pp. 80-118; Barry R. Posen, *The Source of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany Between Two World Wars* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984); Barry R. Posen and Stephen Van Evera, Reagan Administration Defense Policy: Departure from Containment,' in Kenneth A. Oye, Robert J. Lieber, and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Eagle Resurgent? The Reagan Era in American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Little Brown, 1987). Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (New Jersey: Cornell University Press, 1990); Walt, 'The Case for Finite Confrontation: *International Security*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Summer 1989), pp. 5-50; Jack Levy, 'Declining Power and the Preventive Motive for War,' *World Politics*, vol. 40, no. 1 (October 1987), pp. 82-107; Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disaster of 1914* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

foreign policy is unnecessary and counter-productive.[12] Put simply, the position of defensive realism is that systemic factors influence some kinds of foreign policy behaviour, but not all; when the security dilemma is at a fever pitch, a state will behave aggressively and its behaviour will be driven by systemic incentives; but in normal circumstances, which are more common in the international environment, systemic incentives will play only a marginal role in the foreign policy behaviour of states.

Following the end of the Cold War, when structural realism was on the back foot, a group of realist scholars began to reformulate realist arguments in light of the changed international environment. They attempted to bridge the arguments of offensive and defensive realism while emphasising how domestic politics plays a critical role in states' responses to structural conditions and pressures. Branded as neo-classical realist, they advanced the argument that a country's foreign policy is driven foremost by its place in the international system measured in terms of relative material power capabilities vis-a-vis the rest of the international system. However, the impact of such capabilities is *indirect* and *complex* because systemic forces must be translated through an intervening variable at the unit level.[13] As foreign policy choices are made by actual political leaders, it is their perception of the country's relative power that matters most in the making of policy choices, *not* the relative quantities of physical resources.[14]

Leaders, of course, are constrained by both international and domestic factors. As leaders may not have complete control over the resources to be used for pursuing foreign policy, it is important to look at the strength and structure of institutions relative to their societies. It will indicate how resources are distributed and how much is allocated for foreign policy, which, in turn, will have an impact on policy choices. Despite acknowledging the role of domestic factors, neo-classical realists still privilege external variables by arguing that foreign policy theorising must begin at the systemic level, that is, by interpreting a state's relative position in the system. Analysis of unit level variables comes subsequently.

The key difference between neo-classical realism and the two strands of structural realism - offensive and defensive - is that while the latter two realisms assume that states seek

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[12] Stephen Walt, 'The Search for a Science of Strategy: A Review Essay on *Makers of Modern Strategy,' International Security,* vol. 12, no. 1 (Summer 1987), pp. 140-166.

[13] Zakaria, 'Realism and Domestic Politics,' p. 197. Also see, Rose, 'Neo-classical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy'; Randall L. Schweller, 'Neo-realism's Status Quo Bias What Security Dilemma?' *Security Studies,* vol. 5, no. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 90-121; Steven E. Lobell, Norin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[14] Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,' p. 147.

security, in contrast, neo-classical realist scholars posit that states seek to control and shape the external environment in response to the uncertainties of international anarchy.[15] International anarchy, neo-classical realists believe, is neither Hobbesian nor benign, rather it is murky and opaque. The key implication of this is that it is difficult to clearly tell whether security is scarce or plentiful, hence states must dwell in twilight and act accordingly.

Integrative/Inclusive Perspective

Some analysts criticize the *Innenpolitik* and *Aussenpolitik* schools of thought by making the point that they focus either on domestic level variables or systemic factors in explaining the foreign policy behaviour of states.[16] Such a partial focus, they argue, does not provide a good account of states' foreign policy behaviour. The relationship between international and domestic politics is a two-way traffic and one cannot be privileged at the expense of the other. Rather, they maintain the challenge is how to integrate both sets of variables and build a framework that can explain which part of foreign policy is influenced by systemic factors, and which part of it is driven by domestic independent variables.

Robert Putnam argues that it is 'fruitless to debate whether domestic politics really determine international relations, or the reverse.' In his view, the challenge really is to know and theorise 'when' and 'how' external and internal politics are entangled and influence the foreign policy behaviour of states.[17] Similarly, Zakaria maintains that 'a good account of a nation's foreign policy should include systemic, domestic, and other influences, specifying what aspects of the policy can be explained by what factors.'[18]

Paul Kennedy provides a sophisticated analysis of integrative perspective contextualising Wilhelmine German's *Weltpolitik.* He specifies which part of the Wilhelmine foreign policy can be explained by systemic factors, and which parts can be explained by domestic structures and Kaiser Wilhelm's personality.[19]

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[15] On this point, see Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[16] Zakaria maintains that '[O]ver the last decade, scholars of international relations have either ignored the international system or never moved beyond it.' See, Zakaria, 'Realism and Domestic Politics,' p. 198.

[17] Robert D. Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: the Logic of Two-level Games,' *International Organization,* vol. 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988), p. 427.

[18] Zakaria, 'Realism and Domestic Politics,' p. 198.

[19] Paul Kennedy, 'The Kaiser and German *Weltpolitik:* Reflections on Wilhelm II's Place in the Making of German Foreign Policy,' in John C.G. Rohl and Nicholas Sombart, eds., *Kaiser Wilhelm II: New Interpretations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 143-168.

How do the claims of the aforesaid theoretical perspectives account for explaining Sheikh Hasina's government's foreign policy toward India? This paper will provide some insights about the validity of the theoretical claims discussed above.

Bangladesh's India Policy and Bangladesh-India Relations, 1971-2008

The 'India factor' has played a key role in the formulation of Bangladesh foreign policy since its independence in 1971. Over the past four decades, Bangladesh-India relations have experienced ups and downs, but the 'India factor', as a positive force or a negative one, has remained constant and continued to affect Bangladesh's foreign policy behaviour. Indeed, Dhaka's foreign policy in the past four decades can be divided into two broad types: 'pro-India' and 'anti-India'. This may seem arbitrary but the distinction helps to understand the extent of India's influence in Bangladesh's foreign policy. The general trend has been that when an AL government was in power, it adopted an India-positive foreign policy, while non-AL governments generally maintained an attitude of mistrust toward New Delhi, thus pursuing a counterbalancing strategy vis-a-vis India.

The first post-independence government of Bangladesh led by the AL pursued a clear pro-India foreign policy, and during its short tenure from 1971-75, Dhaka and New Delhi developed a very close, cooperative relationship, which is generally dubbed as a 'honeymoon' period.[20] The key reason for adopting an India-positive foreign policy orientation by the AL government was India's contribution to Bangladesh's independence. India, notably, not only provided diplomatic and moral support and hosted more than 10 million refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan for months, it also intervened militarily and played an instrumental role in the defeat of the Pakistan army in East Pakistan and the birth of independent Bangladesh.[21] New Delhi accorded recognition to Bangladesh as an independent state on 6 December 1971, well before the war ended. Hence, it was a foregone conclusion that Dhaka would pursue an India-positive foreign policy and that the two countries would develop a closer relationship in the war's aftermath. But, notwithstanding their warm beginning, the two countries developed 'seeds of discord' on some issues in the

[20] Harun ur Rashid, *Bangladesh Foreign Policy: Realities, Priorities and Challenges* (Dhaka: Academic Press and Publishers Library, 2010, revised edition), p. 89.

[21] On the role of India and for an analysis of the 1971 war, see Robert Jackson, *South Asian Crisis: India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975); Richard Sisson, and Leo E. Rose. *War and Session: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

later years of the AL tenure,[22] which came into the open once the AL government fell after a bloody military coup in 1975.

The Bangladesh-India relationship overnight plummeted and became hostile once the AL government was toppled and a military regime, led by General Ziaur Rahman, (Zia), took over. Mistrust and mutual hostility were the dominant norms in Bangladesh-India relations during Zia's tenure. For one thing, the military coup was justified on the grounds that the AL government was selling out the country's interests to India and Dhaka had become subservient to New Delhi. Many of the AL government's initiatives, such as the creation of a para-military force called *Rakkhi Bahini,* were perceived by the Bangladesh army as India's blueprint to keep the armed forces divided and weak in order to perpetuate its influence on Bangladesh.[23] This sparked anger towards the military regime in Dhaka. It was exacerbated when Zia attempted to build a domestic support base by emphasising a religious identity for the state, which essentially had an anti-India connotation.[24] Further, the military government's foreign policy approach, discussed below, also greatly harmed the relationship.

As Bangladesh-India relations became hostile, the Zia regime cultivated closer ties with China, Pakistan and Muslim countries as a countervailing weight to ease New Delhi's pressure and hostility.[25] Dhaka's action raised security concerns in New Delhi and went against India's long-held regional security strategy[26]. The gap in the security perception and

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[22] Akmal Hussain, 'The Bangladesh-India Relations 1972-75: Seeds of Future Discord,' in Muzaffar Ahmed and Abul Kalam, eds., *Bangladesh Foreign Relations: Changes and Directions* (Dhaka: UPL, 1989), pp. 9-19; Ishtiaq Hossain, 'Bangladesh-India Relations: Issues and Problems,' in Emajuddin Ahmed, ed., *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: A Small State's Imperative* (Dhaka: UPL, 1984), pp. 34-51.

[23] It is noteworthy that this force was immediately disbanded following the 1975 military coup.

[24] Professor Akmal Hussain of Dhaka University discussed this point at length in an interview with this author on 4 February 2012. In his view, the emphasis on Islamic identity was a return to the old Hindu-Muslim divide that existed in the subcontinent's politics since the time of British colonial rule. For a perceptive analysis of the historical process of Islamisation of Bengal, the changing frontiers, and its implications for today's Bangladesh-India relations, see Partha S. Ghose, 'Changing Frontiers: Making Deep Sense of India-Bangladesh Relations,' *South Asia Research,* vol. 31, no. 3 (2012), pp. 195-211.

[25] Bangladesh perceived India's hostility as a serious threat to its survival as a sovereign entity, which was amplified in the wake of Sikkim's merger with the Indian Union in 1975; hence the cultivation of closer ties with China and Pakistan was a counterbalancing strategy to ward off the India 'threat'. For a discussion on this point, see Bhumitra Chakma, 'South Asia's Realist Fascination and the Alternatives,' *Contemporary Security Policy,* vol. 30, no. 3 (December 2009), p. 404.

[26] India adopted the security strategy of the British Raj following independence and conceived its security in terms of the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean region. Hence, India perceived Bangladesh's closer ties with China and Pakistan as inimical to its security interests. For the historical origins of this Indian strategy, see Shelton Kodikara, *Strategic Factors in Interstate Relations in South Asia* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1984); Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest for Security: Defence Policies, 1947-1965* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967). For a modern version of

strategies of the two countries gradually widened in the ensuing years as both began to pursue mutually destabilising policies; for example, India began to assist Shanti Bahini guerrillas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, while Bangladesh began to collaborate with China and Pakistan and act as a conduit to transfer arms to insurgents in northeast India.[27] Consequently, a pattern of a Bangladesh-India 'insecurity spiral' emerged, which deepened their mutual mistrust and hostility. Against such a background, New Delhi hardened its position on various bilateral issues, particularly on the sharing of common river waters that had a devastating environmental impact on Bangladesh, which further deteriorated the relationship of the two countries. It was clear that the relationship was destined to become rocky in the years to come.

The tenure of the first military regime came to an abrupt end in 1981 when General Ziaur Rahman was assassinated in a military coup. The coup plotters, however, could not capture the state as the coup took place in a regional city, Chittagong. In the presidential election that followed, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) [28] candidate, Abdus Sattar, was elected and formed the next government. The Sattar government's tenure was short-lived as army chief General H.M. Ershad forced the elected president to hand over power to him on the charge of inefficiency. The second military regime took over on 24 March, 1982, and continued for eight years until General Ershad was forced out of power in a mass movement in December 1990. During the period of the second military regime, Dhaka more or less followed a similar approach towards India as that of its predecessor, the Zia regime. It also emphasised the Islamic identity of the Bangladesh polity and cultivated closer ties with China, Pakistan and the Islamic states. There was continuity in the India policy during the second military regime and Bangladesh-India relations remained as hostile as in the first military regime.

The beginning of the 1990s saw the advent of democratic governance in Bangladesh after 16 years of military rule. Although a democratic government led by the BNP was

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India's regional security doctrine, see Devin T. Hagerty, 'India's Regional Security Doctrine,' *Asian Survey*, vol. vol. 31, no. 4 (April 1991), pp. 351-363; Bhabani Sen Gupta, 'The Indian Doctrine,' *India Today*, 31 August 1983.

[27] Subir Bhaumik terms such assistance to insurgent groups against each other as 'proxy wars'. See, Subir Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire: North-East India* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1996).

[28] It is noteworthy that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party was created by the first military ruler, General Ziaur Rahman. Hence, although a civilian government was installed with Abdul Sattar as president, the policies of the military regime continued during the tenure of the short-lived civilian government. It meant that Bangladesh-India relations were not affected by the advent of a civilian government in Dhaka and the basic premise of the relationship remained the same.

installed in Dhaka in 1991, Bangladesh-India relations still remained basically frozen. As noted earlier, the BNP, created by the first military ruler, General Zia, emphasised a religious identity for the Bangladesh polity, and had an anti-India connotation. By implication, it meant that the BNP government's India policy, despite its democratic credentials, was similar to that of the first military regime. New Delhi demonstrated little interest in improving relations with Bangladesh under the BNP government, hence the icy relationship continued during the tenure of the BNP government from 1991 to 1996.

The relationship reverted to something like normalcy when the AL returned to power by winning the 1996 general elections. Although falling far short of the historical ideal of the early 1970s, Bangladesh-India relations improved considerably under the Sheikh Hasina-led AL government (1996-2001). After decades of mistrust and suspicion, the relationship started to thaw as both Dhaka and New Delhi began to pursue positive approaches towards each other. One particular sign of a gradually improving relationship was the conclusion of the Ganges water sharing agreement, which New Delhi had refused to sign with the previous governments.[29] Yet, there were limits to this improvement due to two primary reasons. First, the AL had a thin majority in parliament, which meant that the government had little room to manoeuvre against strong opposition from several political parties, such as the BNP and the Jamat-e-Islami. Second, following the capture of power in India by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1998, the steady improvement of Bangladesh-India relations were stymied as the BJP government strongly raised the controversial issue of 'illegal Muslim immigrants' from Bangladesh to northeast India.[30]

The Bangladesh-India relationship deteriorated again when the BNP returned to power by winning the 2001 general elections. The policies of the two countries once again hardened as they developed differences on security perceptions, owing in particular to India's suspicion of Bangladesh's hand in the insurgencies of northeast India[31] and Dhaka's perception that New Delhi wanted to punish Bangladesh. Although there was some security

[29] For details on the treaty, see Ishtiaq Hossain, 'Bangladesh-India Relations: The Ganges Water Sharing Treaty and Beyond,' *Asian Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Fall, 1998), pp. 131-150

[30] For a discussion on this, see Denis Wright, 'Bangladesh and the BJP,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2007), pp. 381-393.

[31] A case is now pending in a Bangladesh court in which it is alleged that the director of a Bangladesh intelligence agency was involved in the transfer of weapons to insurgent groups in northeast India. The incident took place during the tenure of BNP government. See, '10-Truck Arms Haul: Trial begins with deposition of 3 witnesses,' *The Daily Star*, 30 November 2011.

cooperation during the period of indirect military rule from 2007-08,[32] a generally negative attitude and mistrust against each other continued in the Bangladesh-India relationship.

Barring the period of the AL government during 1996-2001, mistrust and suspicion primarily characterised Bangladesh-India relations from the mid-1970s to the end of 2008. Dhaka perceived that India posed the greatest security threat to the country's survival as a sovereign state. Contrarily, New Delhi viewed Bangladesh's cultivation of closer ties with China and Pakistan as inimical to its security interests. Owing to such perceptions, they pursued policies that aimed at destabilising each other. Hence, throughout the whole period examined above, relations were tense and occasionally hostile. The Bangladesh-India relationship was transformed with the change of government in Dhaka in early 2009.

Sheikh Hasina's India Policy and Bangladesh-India Relations: 2009-2012

The Bangladesh military ruled the country, albeit indirectly under the garb of a caretaker government, from 2006 to 2008. As outside and inside pressures mounted to return to democracy, the military eventually relented and general elections were held on 29 December, 2008. The 14-party coalition led by the AL gained a landslide victory in the elections and formed a new government in early January.

As prime minister, Sheikh Hasina moved quickly to reassess the country's foreign policy orientation, particularly its India policy. The developments of the subsequent three years clearly indicate that the Hasina government reversed the policies of its predecessors and adopted an India-positive approach. Theoretically, there were alternative choices for the government when deciding upon the country's India policy. For example, it could have continued with the policy of its predecessors and maintained closer ties with China and Pakistan at the expense of India; or it could have opted for a 'neutral' or 'balanced' approach, engaging India, China and Pakistan/Islamic countries on an equal footing. The Hasina government clearly chose to draw closer to India and bandwagoned with this rising power.

New Delhi welcomed Dhaka's India-positive foreign policy and attempted to seize the opportunity by positive gestures and undertaking a number of initiatives toward the Hasina government. A year after she assumed office, Sheikh Hasina went to New Delhi in January 2010 to meet her Indian counterpart. At this summit meeting, they agreed to a forward-looking, transformative agenda in order to build what they called an 'irreversible' cooperative

[32] For example, the Bangladesh Rifles reportedly destroyed two Indian militants camps inside Bangladesh's territory in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region in late 2007. See, 'Bangla destroyed two Indian militant camps on its soil: BSF,' *The Indian Express,* 6 December 2007.

relationship between the two neighbours.[33] In September 2011, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh paid a return visit to Dhaka to carry forward the transformative agenda initiated in 2010. Notwithstanding the fact that some issues still remain unresolved between the two countries, the relationship has been transformed to a level that was not apparent in the past several decades.

What follows is a brief survey of some important issues in Bangladesh-India relations and how Dhaka and New Delhi have attempted to resolve them over the past three years. The survey is divided into two broad sections: politico-security and economic issues. This exercise principally highlights two points: (1) the nature of Dhaka's changed India approach and how, despite domestic pressure, the Hasina government has remained committed to that approach; and (2) how the Bangladesh-India relationship has evolved and transformed in the past three years.

Politico-Security Issues

Security/Terrorism: Security cooperation is one of the key areas where the Bangladesh-India relationship has improved most in the past three years. In particular, the extent of this improvement can be appreciated if it is compared with the state of security relations prior to the AL's assumption of office in 2009. Before 2009, as discussed in the previous section, mistrust and mutual suspicion had characterised their security relationship and each considered the other as a source of security threat.

After assuming office, the Bangladesh foreign minister quite emphatically announced: 'We have pledged not to allow our land to be used by any terrorists. We are determined about it.'[34] It was a clear signal that the AL government would extend security cooperation to India and pay heed to the longstanding Indian complaint that terrorists and insurgents were using Bangladeshi territory. Initially, some in India suspected that statements emerging from Dhaka could turn out to be nothing more than rhetoric, for in the past such statements had been made without follow-up action, but the measures taken by the Hasina government proved such suspicions wrong. Dhaka, in due course, took action against Harkatul Jihad al Islam (HuJI) and Jamaat ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), and handed over two Laskar-e-Toiba (LeT)

[33] For a discussion on Sheikh Hasina's India visit in 2010, see Anand Kumar, 'Shaikh Hasina's Visit to India and the Future of Indo-Bangladesh Relations.' *Asian Affairs*, vol. 41, no. 3 (November 2010), p. 425.

[34] 'Bangladesh vows not to allow terrorists to use its land,' *Daily News and Analysis*, 6 December 2009.

members of Indian origin who had been operating from Bangladesh.[35] Such actions by Bangladesh's authorities proved handy for New Delhi to fight terrorism within India.

The Hasina government's actions against Indian insurgents using Bangladeshi territory have been no less significant for New Delhi. In November 2009, Bangladeshi authorities caught and handed over ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) foreign secretary Sashadhar Choudhury and finance secretary Chitraban Hazarika to the Indian security forces. Afterwards, Dhaka also captured and handed over Arabinda Rajkhowa, the ULFA chairman, together with his bodyguard, Palash Phukan, and the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of ULFA, Hitesh Kalita, to Assam Police.[36] Bangladesh authorities have acted in a similar manner against other Indian insurgent groups. Indeed, Dhaka's help contributed profoundly to India's success in bringing the insurgency problem in its northeast region under control.

New Delhi also appears to have extended its cooperation to Dhaka on security and intelligence matters. In January 2012, Dhaka unearthed a coup plot by some jihadi-leaning military officers against the government. The tip-off, it was subsequently revealed, came from Indian intelligence agencies.[37] This meant that there has been significant intelligence cooperation between the two countries.

Dhaka and New Delhi took significant steps to formalise security cooperation when Sheikh Hasina visited New Delhi in January 2010. Three agreements on security cooperation were signed at the summit meeting with Manmohan Singh: (1) Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters; (2) Transfer of Sentenced Persons; and (3) Combating International Terrorism, Organised Crime, and Illicit Drug Trafficking. The two countries have also initiated discussions on an extradition treaty;[38] if concluded, this will further boost security cooperation between the two countries.

Security cooperation highlights the extent of closeness between the two countries during Sheikh Hasina's second term as prime minister. It also demonstrates her India-leaning foreign policy orientation, implying that her government has abandoned the counterbalancing strategy adopted by her predecessors.

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[35] '2 Laskar Men Held Inside Indian Border,' *The Daily Star*, 24 November 2009.

[36] 'Ulfa Chief Handed Over to India,' *Deccan Chronicle,* 4 December 2009.

[37] 'Delhi 'tip-off' helped foil coup,' *The Telegraph* (Kolkata), 21 January 2012.

[38] 'India, Bangladesh Working on Extradition Treaty: Hasina,' *The Times of India,* 13 January 2010.

Water sharing: For Bangladesh, the sharing of common rivers' waters is an important issue, for it is the lower riparian of almost all the 54 rivers common to itself and India.[39] As India increases the use of water and withdraws more and more water upstream, this rings alarm bells in Bangladesh as it faces adverse environmental, economic and social consequences.[40]

Although Dhaka and New Delhi sorted out the sharing of a major river water source - the Ganges - by signing an agreement in 1996 that removed a major irritant that often rocked their bilateral relations in the past, agreements on the sharing of other major rivers are yet to be concluded. One such river is the Teesta; talks on this river began in the 1980s, but decades of negotiations have failed to yield a solution to the issue. Prospects for an agreement on the sharing of the Teesta water appeared bright, indeed imminent, when India committed to find a solution to the issue during Sheikh Hasina's New Delhi visit in January 2010. Negotiations in the following months yielded a result and an agreement was drawn up for signature at the time of Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in September 2011. That, however, went awry due to the last-minute opposition of Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of India's West Bengal state.[41] In its aftermath, New Delhi has promised to resolve the issue on a 'priority' basis.

The failure to sign the Teesta agreement has increased domestic pressure on the Hasina government. The rightwing political parties have urged the government to change its pro-India foreign policy orientation. This pressure will grow stronger as the country moves closer to the next general election, which is due to be held in early 2014.

Another controversy seems to be brewing over the Indian plan to build a dam at a point called Tipaimukh on the river Barak. Barak is a tributary of a major river - the Meghna - and Dhaka fears that Bangladesh will be adversely affected if the planned construction of the dam goes ahead. The Hasina government has expressed Bangladesh's concern to New Delhi and raised the issue when Manmohan Singh visited Dhaka in September 2011. Singh assured Bangladesh's authorities by saying that India would not do anything to harm Bangladesh.[42]

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[39] Bangladesh and India share 54 common rivers; 51 rivers originate in India (or China but flow through Indian territories) and 3 rivers originate in Bangladesh but enters into India and then again return to Bangladesh eventually to pump into the Bay of Bengal.

[40] For an analysis of environmental and other consequences of India's upstream withdrawal of waters on Bangladesh, see Nahid Islam, 'The Ganges Water Dispute: Environmental and Related Impacts on Bangladesh,' *BIISS Journal* (Dhaka), vol. 12, no. 3 (July 1991), pp. 263-292; Narottam Gaan, *Environmental Degradation and Conflict: The Case of Bangladesh-India* (Dhaka: Parma, 1998).

[41] 'Teesta pact with Bangladesh put off after Mamata sulk,' *Times of India,* 6 September 2011.

[42] 'Will not do anything which harms Bangladesh,' *Prothom Alo*, 6 September 2011.

Notwithstanding the persistence of disputes between Bangladesh and India over the sharing of common river waters, which perhaps is natural given the geographic character of the region, New Delhi, in the past three years, has demonstrated a considerably positive attitude in accommodating Bangladesh's interests. New Delhi's inability to conclude a treaty on the Teesta river water during Manmohan Singh's Dhaka visit has created disappointment in Bangladesh, but Dhaka realises that New Delhi genuinely wants to sign an agreement on the Teesta and that it is only the West Bengal chief minister's intransigence that is holding it back from doing so.

Land and Maritime Boundaries and Enclave Issues: Basically of a historical nature resulting from the 1947 partition of the subcontinent, the land boundary and enclave issues have remained unresolved till today, complicating Bangladesh-India relations ever since the former emerged as an independent state in 1971. In 1974, during the 'honeymoon' period of Bangladesh-India relations, the two countries signed a comprehensive treaty, known as the Indira-Mujib agreement, on land boundary issues when it was thought that those disputes had become a thing of the past. Although Bangladesh almost immediately ratified the agreement, New Delhi balked at ratifying it, and after 1975, dragged its feet due to the rocky relationship between the two countries.

After decades of neglect, land and maritime boundaries and enclave issues were taken up for serious discussion following the installation of the Hasina government in 2009. During Hasina's visit to New Delhi in January 2010, the two prime ministers agreed to settle the boundary issues in light of the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and formed a Joint Land Boundary Working Group to expedite the process of negotiations. They also agreed to resolve the dispute over their maritime boundary in an amicable manner.

That was carried forward when Manmohan Singh visited Dhaka in early September 2011. During Singh's visit, a protocol to the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement was signed 'to address all outstanding land boundary issues and provide a final settlement to the India-Bangladesh boundary.'[43] It noted the outstanding issues as follows: (i) undemarcated land boundaries in three sectors viz. Daikhata-56 (West Bengal), Muhuri River-Belonia (Tripura) and Dumabari (Assam); (ii) enclaves; and (iii) adverse possessions. Besides, the exchange of adversely possessed lands along the Bangladesh-India border in Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya, and West Bengal and 162 enclaves - 111 Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves inside India - were finalised at the time of the prime ministers' meeting.

[43] 'Details of the Deals,' *Daily Star*, 7 September 2011.

New Delhi has, so far, not ratified the protocol in parliament, thus delaying its implementation, which has created resentment in Bangladesh.

During Manmohan Singh's visit, India also agreed to keep the Tinbigha corridor, which connects Dahagram and Angorporta enclaves with mainland Bangladesh, open for 24 hours, thereby removing a longstanding irritant in Bangladesh-India relations. Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the opening of the corridor round-the-clock in October 2011.[44]

The maritime boundaries of the two countries still remain undemarcated, as several rounds of discussions in 1974, 1980 and 2008 failed to produce any resolution of this longstanding dispute.[45] Since 2009, Dhaka and New Delhi have left the issue on the backburner, only occasionally expressing their desire to resolve the issue through negotiations without much by way of concrete follow-up actions. For example, in the joint communiqué that was released following the meeting of the two prime ministers in New Delhi in January 2010, it was stated that the issue would be resolved in a peaceful and friendly manner. But the issue was left out of the agenda of discussions during Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in September 2011. In the meantime, Dhaka has gone to the International Court of Arbitration for a permanent resolution of the maritime boundary dispute, to which New Delhi has given its consent. A ruling from the court will be obtained in 2013.[46]

Economic Issues

Trade and Investment: Bangladesh and India have made significant progress on trade and economic matters in the past three years. Historically, trade between Bangladesh and India has favoured India and the trade imbalance still remains high: over US$4 billion in 2010-11 against Bangladesh.[47] Indian leaders have expressed their commitment to reduce the imbalance and New Delhi has already taken some positive steps towards that. For example, it removed 47 Bangladeshi products from the negative list of imports in order to allow them

[44] 'New start for Dahagram-Angorpota,' *Prothom Alo*, 22 October 2011.

[45] For a brief discussion on negotiations until 2008, see Alok Kumar Gupta, 'Indo-Bangladesh Maritime Border Dispute: Problems and Prospects,' IPRS (Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies) article, no. 2699, 7 October 2008. Available at: http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/indo-bangladesh-maritime-border-dispute-problems-and-prospects-2699.html

[46] 'Will maritime boundary issue remain unresolved?, *Prothom Alo*,5 September 2011.

[47] In 2008-9, 2009-10 and 2010-11, Bangladesh's imports from India were USD million 2841.58, 3202.00, and 4586.80 and exports to India were 276.58, 305.00 and 512.5 respectively. See, 'India-Bangladesh Relations,' Ministry of External Affairs, India, January 2012; available at: http://mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50042439. Perhaps in the near term trade imbalance will continue to remain before it comes down in the longer run with further concrete measures.

duty free access to the Indian market.[48] Consequently, exports from Bangladesh to India are expected to grow at US$1 billion by July 2012 over a period of one year.[49] New Delhi also offered a US$1 billion line of credit to Bangladesh for 21 projects during the visit of Sheikh Hasina to India in January 2010. It is noteworthy that thus far, this remains the largest offer of such a line of credit by India to a single country.

India also agreed to provide power-starved Bangladesh 250 MW of electricity from its grid, for which the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during Sheikh Hasina's visit to New Delhi in January 2010. Eventually, a formal agreement was signed in March 2012 under which Bangladesh would receive 250 megawatts of electricity from top Indian power utility NTPC Ltd and could buy another 250 MW through competitive bidding.[50] Additionally, India has offered its assistance to build a 1,320 MW electricity production plant in Khulna as a joint venture. Given Bangladesh's severe power shortage, India's assistance could play a vital role in meeting domestic power demand and propelling economic growth.

Transit: New Delhi has long demanded transit facilities from Dhaka to better connect, economically, its remote northeast region with the mainland. Bangladesh refused to accede to this demand arguing that doing so would create security risks and infringe the country's sovereignty. In fact, Dhaka's refusal was not so much about security or sovereignty as it was about the poor state of the relationship between the two countries for decades.

A policy shift on the transit issue occurred when the Hasina government changed the country's India policy and as relations between the two countries began to improve. Sheikh Hasina informed Indian authorities during her visit to New Delhi in 2010 that Bangladesh, in principle, had decided to allow India (and also Nepal and Bhutan) to use the Bangladeshi sea ports of Chittagong and Mongla and the inland water port of Ashuganj.[51] After more than a year of negotiations, an agreement was made ready for signature during the Indian prime minister's visit to Dhaka in September 2011, but finally could not be signed as Dhaka backed off from signing the treaty due to India's inability to ink the Teesta water agreement.[52] Dhaka is willing to sign a transit treaty if New Delhi can deliver a treaty on the Teesta.

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[48] 'Wider Access to Bangla Goods,' *The Telegraph* (Kolkata), 12 January 2010.

[49] 'Export to India to "top 1 bln in July"', 9 July 2012, bdnews24.com; available at: http://www.bdnews24.com/details.php?id=219917&cid=2

[50] 'Bangladesh to buy 500 MW of electricity from India,' *Dawn,* 6 March 2012.

[51] Rahid Ejaj, 'Consensus on Sea-Rail-Road Use,' *Prothom Alo,* 13 January 2010.

[52] 'Transit sinks in Teesta waters,' *The Daily Star,* 7 September 2011.

The above discussion on key issues between Bangladesh and India highlights that both Dhaka and New Delhi have altered their policies radically and have sincerely strived to build a new relationship. Notwithstanding considerable domestic opposition in Bangladesh to her government's India policy, Sheikh Hasina has remained persistent with her India policy and the relationship has improved vastly in the past three years.

Explaining Sheikh Hasina's India Approach

As discussed in the preceding two sections, the second Hasina government brought about a shift in Bangladesh's India policy, radically departing from the policies of its predecessors. There were, as noted above, at least three options before the Hasina government when deciding upon its foreign policy orientation; (1) pursue an India-positive policy in order to get closer to the big neighbour, which essentially means, to put it mildly, 'bandwagoning' with rising India; (2) maintain a counterbalancing strategy, which was the policy of many previous governments, by cultivating closer ties with China, Pakistan and Islamic states (or other power/s); and (3) adopt a balanced approach by not getting too close to any of the powers and maintain equidistance from all powers. The Hasina government chose the first option. The question is, why?

True, there is no easy, straightforward answer to the question, for it involves variables that derive from at least three different sources and levels: personal, national and regional/international. Those variables acted in concert to bring about a shift in the second Hasina government's approach toward India and they continue in an interactive manner to shape Dhaka's foreign policy orientation.

Personality Factor

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the dominant figure within her party, the AL, as well as within the government. Owing to a variety of factors, discussed below, she is personally committed to pursue an India-positive foreign policy and build a closer relationship with the country's biggest neighbour. To understand the current government's India policy, one needs to look at the personality of Sheikh Hasina.[53]

Indeed, to properly appreciate the role of Sheikh Hasina in her government's policy making structure, it is necessary to look at the political culture of Bangladesh, particularly the aspect that relates to the critical importance of certain personalities in Bangladesh politics.

[53] Analyst Amena Mohsin, a professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka, strongly holds such a view; interview with the author in Dhaka on 5 February 2012.

Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh politics, it would be fair to argue, has evolved in a manner in which personalities, rather than institutions, have been dominant. Political parties seldom practiced a democratic method in choosing a leader or office bearers; indeed, everything within a party, history tells us, revolved around the party chief. Hence, when a party came to power, the central figure of that party dominated the government and its decision making.

To highlight the point, let us briefly look at the central role of personalities within the AL and the BNP, the two most dominant political parties of Bangladesh. In the first half of the 1970s, the AL chief, Mujibar Rahman, was the most dominant personality in Bangladesh politics, and he had near absolute authority over his party and the government. In the second half of that decade, that role was played by the chief of the military regime and founder of the BNP, General Ziaur Rahman.[54] When these two personalities were assassinated in two separate military coups, their positions within their respective political parties were 'inherited' by close relatives. In the case of the AL, Sheikh Hasina (current prime minister), Mujib's daughter, took charge of the party, while in the case of the BNP, Zia's widow, Khaleda Zia, became the party's chairperson. Since the 1980s, these two figures have dominated Bangladesh politics.

It is, therefore, evident that Sheikh Hasina's personality is critically important in government decision-making and, accordingly, it would be logical to conclude that she played a decisive role in bringing about a change in the country's India policy. The question is, why did she opt for such a foreign policy orientation?

Sheikh Hasina's positive perception about India was principally formed through her personal experiences and ideological stance. Her party, the AL, led the war of independence in which India played a critical role; this must have left a feeling of gratefulness in her towards India. Moreover, her father Mujibar Rahman, as the head of the first post-independence government, developed a very close relationship with New Delhi. It would not be illogical to posit that she, in some way, inherited the mantle of the Bangladesh-India relationship of the 1970s.

Following the assassination of her father and most of her siblings in the 1975 military coup, Sheikh Hasina was in self-exile in New Delhi and received the hospitality of the Indian government until she returned to Bangladesh in the early 1980s. A causal link between her exile in Delhi and her government's India policy cannot be established; however, one would

[54] For an analysis of Bangladesh's politics of the 1970s, see Marcus Franda, *Bangladesh: the First Decade* (New Delhi: South Asian Publisher, 1982); Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues* (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1980).

tend to think that she must have felt a debt of gratitude to the Indians for the generosity she received during those difficult years. Moreover, during her exile in Delhi, she developed personal friendship with many Indian leaders. Though a causal linkage to her government's India-positive foreign policy is hard to establish, it would, nonetheless, be fair to make a general point that such personal factors, at times, do matter in leaders' policy choices.

Additionally, Sheikh Hasina's ideological stance – a commitment to secularism – should be given proper appreciation to understand her world view and foreign policy orientation. Her ideological position and the experience of 1971 make it natural for her to favour an India-positive foreign policy.

The key point to take home from the above discussion is that the personality factor is important in Bangladeshi politics and the government decision-making structure, and that Sheikh Hasina played a decisive role in choosing an India-positive foreign policy orientation. She continues to play a dominant role in the continuation of the policy option that was adopted at the beginning of her government in 2009.

That said, it is also important to realise that her foreign policy choice is constantly constrained by variables derived from other levels, namely national and regional/international. In other words, while Sheikh Hasina is central in making foreign policy within the government, it does not mean that she has complete freedom of action. After all, foreign policy is not made or operationalised in a vacuum. Internal dynamics and external environment constantly put limits and constraints on the foreign policy of a state. Even though her personality was instrumental in choosing an India-positive foreign policy orientation, its scope of success (or lack of it) was determined by impersonal forces beyond her control. Therefore, the Hasina government's India policy needs to be viewed as a product of competing forces and pressures. Further, impersonal factors that influence her perception put constraints and limits on her choices and actions. The key point, thus, is that she might have made the choice to adopt an India-positive foreign policy orientation, but her policy is constantly affected by factors beyond her control and her foreign policy does not operate in any way she pleases.

Unit/National Level Factors

Several domestic level variables are at play in the Hasina government's India policy. Some of them facilitate her India-positive policy, while others impose constraints and limits. Most significantly, the latter group of variables negates Sheikh Hasina's freedom of action on India policy, which deserves careful consideration.

The AL's ideological position is one of the most important facilitating factors for Hasina government's adoption of an India-positive foreign policy. As noted above, the

Bangladesh polity is more or less equally divided in terms of national identity, some emphasising the Islamic character of the polity, others secularism. The AL represents the views of the latter group, which brings the party closer to India, which has a similar ideological orientation. As history reveals, when the Indian National Congress and AL are in power at the same time in India and Bangladesh respectively, the relationship between Dhaka and New Delhi tends to be closer. Hence, the adoption of an India-positive foreign policy by the AL government may be viewed from the standpoint of ideological affinity.

On the other hand, those who emphasise Islamic identity position themselves on the other side of the scale; that is, if the secularists see India as a 'natural' friend, the Islamists see that country primarily through the opposite lens. As noted earlier, the revival of Islamic identity in Bangladesh politics after 1975 had an anti-India tone. Several major political parties, including the BNP, represent this view. The division within the Bangladesh polity on identity makes India an important factor in the political dynamics of the country, particularly election politics.[55] The implication of this factor for the AL government's India policy is that it constrains Sheikh Hasina's and her government's freedom of action in pursuing an India-positive foreign policy. The scope and continuity of the Hasina government's India policy is greatly affected by the country's domestic politics.

Regional/International

Rapid transformation in the regional/international geo-economic and geo-political structure after the end of the Cold War also had a profound impact on the Hasina government's foreign policy choices. For one thing, the transition of the South Asian region and even beyond has been a key factor that informed the perception of the Hasina government's policy elites, including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. For another, a pragmatic appreciation of the changes taking place warranted that Dhaka opt for an India-positive foreign policy option.

The cruel fact about Bangladesh's geographical location is that it is not only surrounded by India on three sides, the country is, more importantly, the lower riparian of almost all 54 common rivers, which means that it is daunting for the country to make progress by maintaining a hostile relationship with India. Hence, prudence dictates that Bangladesh must work with, and not against, India to protect its interests. This perception is common among the Hasina government's policy elites. For example, Gowher Rizvi, Sheikh

[55] On this, see Smruti S. Pattanaik, 'Internal Political Dynamics and Bangladesh's Foreign Policy Towards India,' *Strategic Analysis,* vol. 29, no. 3 (July-September 2005), pp. 395-426.

Hasina's international affairs advisor, maintains that in Bangladesh there is 'a realisation that India is our biggest and closest neighbour, and the earlier policy of hostility is futile in a rapidly globalising society.'[56]

The sense that Bangladesh must work with India for its own progress became even more important in the context of the latter's gradual rise as a global power.[57] Since India adopted economic reform policies in 1991, its economy has grown at a rapid pace and is now poised to become the world's third largest economy in the coming decades. Further, the growing strategic partnership between India and the United States, symbolised in particular by the conclusion of a landmark nuclear cooperation agreement in 2006, and by the American commitment to help India's rise as a global power, have enhanced India's rising power image in Bangladesh. The potential global rise of India was perceived to be a cause for bandwagoning with the rising power in the neighbourhood.

Simultaneously, the demonstration impact of China's and India's economic growth and their model of cooperation left a positive impact on Bangladeshi policy elites. Despite longstanding border disputes, New Delhi and Beijing found ground for cooperation for economic and trade reasons. Why could this not be emulated in other bilateral relationships?

Economic growth now forms an important element of the Hasina government's foreign policy. There has been an emphasis on regional connectivity in Bangladesh's diplomacy in the past three years. Dhaka sees itself at the crossroads of South, Central and Southeast Asia and as a bridge between the three regions. The country's interest in the participation of the Kunming initiative or BCMI is a reflection of this perception; its objective is to tap economic opportunities in the country's surrounding areas. Closer relations with India are, therefore, pivotal to Bangladesh's growth.

The above discussion shows that a variety of factors influenced the Hasina government's foreign policy initiatives. First of all, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's personality was instrumental in choosing an option out of three alternatives for Bangladesh's foreign policy orientation. Her choice was, of course, complemented, and thus aided, by her party's ideological position, namely secularism (a unit level variable). Secularism as the state character, it is noteworthy, is supported by a segment of the Bangladesh polity. Here one

[56] 'India-Bangladesh Ties Is a Model for South Asia,' Interview with Dr. Gowher Rizvi, *The Hindu*, 6 September 2011.

[57] India's global power status is yet to be certain, but analysts believe that India's rise is now inevitable. As an analyst puts it: 'Experts recently stopped asking if India will become a great power and began to wonder what kind of great power it will become.' See Peter R. Lavoy, 'India in 2006: A New Emphasis on Engagement', *Asian Survey*, vol. XLVII, no. 1 (January-February 2007), p. 114.

should not also lose sight of the fact that her personal views were informed by developments inside and outside the country.

While the initial decision to opt for a particular foreign policy orientation can be explained primarily by Sheikh Hasina's personality, its practice cannot be explained by that factor alone. While Sheikh Hasina remains a driving force behind the India-positive foreign policy orientation of her government, its scope is constantly being challenged, and consequently modified, by impersonal factors. Two very important factors in this context are particularly noteworthy. One is the ideological stance of a segment of the Bangladesh polity, which emphasises 'Islamic identity', as opposed to secularism, and is represented by political parties such as the BNP, Jamat-e-Islami etc. These political forces constrain the freedom of action of Sheikh Hasina in pursuit of an India-positive foreign policy. Second, New Delhi's policy actions toward Bangladesh are significant for the sustenance of the Hasina government's India-positive foreign policy. Without tangible policy actions by India that protect Bangladesh's interests, for example, on Teesta water sharing, trade, border issues etc., it is difficult for the Hasina government to justify its India policy domestically. As can be evidenced, these two factors derive from two different levels, i.e. national and external. Here domestic level variables - the configuration of domestic political forces and the ideological division of the Bangladesh polity - and external variables, i.e. India's actions toward Bangladesh, act in an interactive fashion and affect the course of Sheikh Hasina government's India policy.

Conclusion: Theoretical Implications

The Hasina government’s India-positive foreign policy does not derive from a single factor, but is a product of multiple interactive variables. These variables can be located at the personal, national/domestic and regional/international levels. On the balance of causality, it would be imprudent to highlight one variable over the other. Instead, they must be considered eclectically in order to make sense of the second Hasina government's India policy. The three sets of variables are inseparable; indeed, they are complementary and work in an interactive manner. Hence, only an integrated approach that combines variables from three levels provides a complete account of the Hasina government’s foreign policy towards India.

Two variants of structural realism - offensive and defensive - are unable to explain the India policy of the Hasina government and Bangladesh's foreign policy behaviour. If they are right, particularly the offensive variety, Dhaka would have viewed India as a threat and therefore, to exhibit balancing behaviour by invoking China or another power as a countervailing power. But that did not happen. Instead, domestic and national level variables

prevailed against such external conditions in shaping Sheikh Hasina government's India policy.

Similarly, the *Innenpolitik* school of thought alone does not explain the second Hasina government's India positive foreign policy. This school exclusively focuses on domestic factors, which makes it an inadequate framework for understanding Dhaka's India policy. As already alluded, Sheikh Hasina's personality factor was a key driver of her government's India positive foreign policy. But the external environment, either by providing opportunities or by imposing constraints, also played a significant role in the practice of the Hasina government's foreign policy.

Neo-classical realism's argument come very close to explaining the foreign policy of the Hasina government, as it combines both domestic and external/systemic factors. However, its claim that foreign policy analysis must begin by explaining a state's relative power position in the international system does not quite fit in the case of the second Hasina government's foreign policy, particularly since there was no significant change in the structural position of Bangladesh vis-à-vis India. An explanation of Sheikh Hasina's India policy needs to begin by looking at her personal preference rather than Bangladesh's relative power position in the international system.

The Integrative perspective, particularly Paul Kennedy's approach, does provide a better framework for understanding the second Hasina government's India-positive foreign policy orientation. Hasina's foreign policy highlights that there are independent variables in three domains - personal, unit/national level, and external environment - and they act in a complementary and interactive manner. It is possible to look at different parts and stages of Sheikh Hasina's India policy by employing variables at different levels. For example, the initial decision to foster closer ties with New Delhi was based on Hasina's own personal preference. Subsequently, the practice of that policy was modified by constraints put up by domestic and regional/international variables. Therefore, it is arguable that for a complete account of foreign policy one should not provide a partial analysis, but rather that appropriate variables should be identified to explain different parts of a country's foreign policy.

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