

CHINA-BANGLADESH-INDIA TRIANGULAR COOPERATION: OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explain a vision of strategic triangle cooperation among Bangladesh, China, and India from the Bangladeshi perspective. The purpose of this study is to propose a new paradigm of cooperation among the three participating countries, which would lead to mutual benefits and a win-win situation as opposed to the widely-held belief of geopolitical balance of power or rivalry between two major Asian powers- China and India. A “triangular relationship” may be understood as a sort of transactional game among three variable players. Geographically, Bangladesh is surrounded by India on three sides and also has a short land boundary with Myanmar. Thus, Bangladesh is one of the most influential triangle variable players in South Asian in geopolitics. It is quite appreciable that the Government of Bangladesh has already adopted a balanced foreign policy. In its constitutional principle, it has adopted the ‘friendship to all, malice to none.’ Bangladesh is applying that policy on national interest and contributing to maintaining the balance of power in South Asia. This paper will determine the options and implications for Bangladesh in this triangular cooperation and the main institutional factors for implementing strategic partnership in China-India relations.

Keywords: Alliance, Balanced Policy, Cooperation, Regional Security, Rivalry, Triangle.

INTRODUCTION

A strategic triangle relationship is seen as a kind of transactional political game among the three countries (Dittmer, 1981). Bangladesh has emerged as one of the strongest players in the India-Bangladesh-China strategic triangle relationship among the South Asian states. Bangladesh is trying to maintain its two most vital security interests. One of these two security interests is territorial integrity, and the other is political independence. Bangladesh formulates a balanced foreign policy with all the world countries, which is a commendable initiative. Following this, the Constitution of Bangladesh has effectively implemented the principle of

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friendship with all, and hatred for none. Bangladesh has met its legitimate and equitable national interests in the current international political context and is trying to balance regional and continental powers properly. Bangladesh's internal political independence has been threatened several times due to good relations between the two main political parties in Bangladesh and countries like India, China and Pakistan.

India has cultural, social, and economic ties with Bangladesh. Both countries have similarities in history, culture, language as well as traditional values and norms. In the year 1971, during the liberation war in Bangladesh, both countries worked as close allies. It was followed by enhancing mutual trust and confidence in India-Bangladesh relations marked by the signing of the 25-year Friendship Treaty on 19 March 1972 (Chowdhury, 2020). The Bangladesh-India partnership has mainly been aligned with bilateral relations, including trade, culture, military, and people-to-people contacts, which later became deeply involved with the international trust. Confidence plays an essential role in the international relations that prevail in Bangladesh-India relations. Despite India playing a significant role in the Great War of Independence, Bangladesh is at odds with India over river water sharing, National Civil Registration (NRC), Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and border killings (Sufian, 2020). All problems have been solved peacefully by the government of India and Bangladesh except water sharing, NRC, and CAA issues. India wants to keep a close alliance with Bangladesh, especially for the following reasons.

- The geopolitical importance of Bangladesh;
- Tackling China's dominance in Bangladesh;
- Decreasing number of India's allies in South Asia; and
- Protecting the political and economic investment that India already has made there.

On the other hand, Bangladesh has no visible dispute with China. In a complex geopolitical competition in South Asia, China stood up against Bangladesh during Bangladesh's War of Independence, 1971. Nevertheless, China established diplomatic relations with Bangladesh in 1975; now, China is a crucial partner in Bangladesh's development (Datta, 2008). Bangladesh-China relations can grow without any constraint. However, the reality is different from the Bangladesh side. Bangladesh is a part of the larger Ganga-Brahmaputra basin in the north-eastern part of India and southwest China. Bangladesh needs Chinese friendship for its economic and security-related issues. Besides, China needs an alternate access route to the Indian Ocean through the Bay of Bengal for trade and energy supply purposes from the Middle East and Africa. China needs a lot of labor support from Bangladesh too. China also wants to collect labor-intensive manufacturing of its private institutions to countries with cheaper labor. All these make a case for a genuine alliance between Bangladesh and China. China has an enduring vision for South Asia, and Bangladesh is perfectly into it.

India-China relationship has suffered severe deterioration in the months after the clashes in Ladakh in May-June 2020 (Pathak, 2021). Nepal has already passed a new map of the three lands claimed by India. China is trying to draw closer attention to India's close ally Bangladesh in such a delicate situation. China and India are some of the largest countries in

the world in terms of size, population, economy. India is far behind China but has gained the status of emerging powers. Both have ambitions. Again, the neighbors of the two countries are 'Lilliput' compared to them. These Lilliputs are very important to Gullivers again. South Asian countries are getting to know the matter very well (Doroshko & But, 2020). They are sometimes getting help from both the two regional superpowers and getting random in the contest. The recent developments in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, in particular, have led to significant changes. Bangladesh's security interests are closely related to the regional security environment in South Asia, which is primarily dependent on China-India relations. One of the objectives of this study is to find out how India-China hostile relations can be exploited to meet its economic and security interests in Bangladesh.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Asia's two strongest rivals and Bangladesh's two regional neighbors, China and India, have a history of widespread animosity (Snedden, 2016). Chinese strategist Sun Tzu and Indian strategist Kautilya have almost identical ideas for identifying friends and foes (Deshingkar, 1996). India has had conflicts with China at various times since independence from the British in 1947. It was followed by a major war in 1962 over the Indo-China land border. The same conflict led to minor clashes with both countries at the local level in the years 1967 and 1987. The current state of Indo-China relations in the context of 21st-century international politics is a stream of neo-economic interdependence where border disputes remain unresolved. Dominance over the South Asian region and the Indian Ocean has given rise to a new form of conflict between India and China in 21st-century international politics. This rivalry between the two countries is well felt in all the small countries of South Asia, including Bangladesh. In the regional political context, India is dominating South Asia because of its geographical location. However, China is trying to increase its influence with smaller countries in South Asia. Since the Sino-Indian War of 1962, China has sought and succeeded in establishing good relations with its neighbors in South Asia (Stafi, 2018). That is why India has always been skeptical of China's relations with the small countries of the South Asian region. Therefore, the future trends in India-China relations have been politically and militarily critical for Bangladesh.

India's unwavering support to Bangladesh in the Great War of Liberation, 1971 and India's role in Bangladesh has been much appreciated and acknowledged. As a result, bilateral relations between the two countries began in 1971. On the other hand, China did not recognize Bangladesh until 1975 and did not formally establish bilateral relations with Bangladesh. It is to be noted here that in the Great War of Liberation against Pakistan in 1971, China stood with Pakistan and not for Bangladesh. However, China's position is related to the regional politics of the time. When Bangladesh applied for the membership of the UN in 1972, China used the Security Council's veto to block Bangladesh from entering the UN (Rahman & Uddin, 2011). As a result, the tension between China and Bangladesh continued to grow. The primary basis of Bangladesh's relationship with China is mutual trust and economic interests. However, China is acting as one of the economic partners of Bangladesh in the current international political context.

In the international political context of the 21st century, the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry in South Asia is intensifying day by day. As a result, both countries are doubling their vision

to bring Bangladesh into its orbit due to its geostrategic importance. In the political context of world trade, its imports from Bangladesh could significantly increase, and this increase in imports could create opportunities for North America and Europe to export their goods to new destinations. On the other hand, India-China domination could further enhance diplomatic and cultural relations with Bangladesh (Paul, T. V. 2019).

In the struggle for supremacy in the Bay of Bengal, India and China will do everything in their power to keep Bangladesh on their side. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Bangladesh needs to be more conscious of India and China's competitive relationships. Bangladesh is an instrument in India-China geopolitical rivalry in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal (Bhattacharjee, 2017). Both countries are trying to use Bangladesh to strengthen their operations in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. In order to overcome this competitive situation, Bangladesh should learn from both countries how to develop the economic, political, and cultural life of Bangladesh without directly supporting any party. Bangladesh's economic and infrastructural development is a tremendous advantage for Bangladesh while maintaining good relations with India and China. To successfully implement this policy, Bangladesh should formulate a balanced foreign policy to maintain good relations with India and China (Anu Anwar, 2019).

Bangladesh can be benefited from both sides. This opportunity has been accomplished by completing administrative, political, and structural construction to bring low-tech Chinese factories to Bangladesh, making Chinese investment in industrial-energy and infrastructure development, taking full advantage of the ocean-going blue economy. Bangladesh's Bay of Bengal and Chittagong port are entering into this important economic area. This way, China's Yunnan, Xinjiang, and other northeastern Indian states of India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan get access to the Bay of Bengal, and products produced in these places will enter the world market, and the outside products can get into those regions. Suppose the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) and the Bay of Bengal-centric cooperation process are implemented in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). In that case, its facilities will be available to all South and Southeast Asian countries. If a deep seaport can be built in Bangladesh, then Chittagong will have access to this huge trade route. Bangladesh may take advantage of the rivalry of the two Asian giants, namely China and India. It is essential to overcome this situation to come out with Bangladesh's national interest without hurting anyone. It requires skill, vision, and wisdom in diplomacy.

BANGLADESH-INDIA RELATIONS

Bangladesh's foreign policy has always been shaped by a few key elements, one of which appears to be the significant 'India factor.' India is, without a doubt, Bangladesh's largest and most important neighbor. Both countries have a large land border, and academics and policymakers in both countries believe that Bangladesh's relationship with India is crucial physically, politically, economically, and strategically. Bangladesh is geo-strategically ringed and barred on three sides by India and the southern side by the Bay of Bengal (Hossain & Islam, 2019). Bangladesh-India relations have frequently been contentious, complicated, tense, and crisis-ridden, with allegations and counter-accusations abounding. However, for the

prosperity of both countries, a strong, brave, and healthy relationship is required. If a lasting solution to the water-sharing issue is found, the recent visit of India's Foreign Secretary and a Bangladeshi delegation to India could be a watershed moment.

India wants to undermine China's influence and change its foreign policy in South Asia. India should avoid interfering in neighboring countries. Not only the government but also the public opinion of neighboring countries has to be given importance. Some interests can be ensured by keeping the friendly government in power for a few days. However, this will not lead to a long-standing solution. India's loneliness in South Asia will continue to grow unless a long-term solution is found. Bangladesh is now India's closest ally in South Asia. Bangladesh is closely associated with India at the moment, but China is improving its relationship. The two countries are working together to increase investment and explore various areas of cooperation. The Rohingya agreement signed recently between the Bangladesh government and Myanmar is alleged to have been mediated by China (Mehzabin & Shuvo, 2021). Something like this was needed to take China's projects forward in the region. If there is an agreement with Bangladesh, Myanmar can avoid western pressure to some extent. The Bangladesh government had aimed to enter into a multilateral agreement in this regard. However, from there, the country withdrew under the influence of China. It is apparent that there is a psychological difference between India and Bangladesh that must be bridged before the two countries can become economically, technologically, and commercially better linked for a variety of reasons (Chowdhury, 2013). It is costly for both countries to remain adversarial in the face of globalization and regionalism, but good ties are also a significant possibility. In the information technology (IT) sector, infrastructure building and sharing, education, and various industrial and technological areas, there are several prospects for collaboration between the two countries, all of which should benefit both countries (Alam, 2019).

BANGLADESH-CHINA RELATIONS

Despite China being a mighty country in naval and land power since ancient times, China has not colonized any other country in its entire history, nor has it occupied any other country. Instead, it has shown deep respect for the independence and sovereignty of all countries. Diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and China began in 1975 (Quiyum & Jahirul, 2021). It was started by Zia-ur Rahman, whose vision was to face east. Since the beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries, it has always been excellent, gradually deepening, and this relationship has passed the test of time. Despite different political ideals and differences in social and cultural systems, the excellent diplomatic relations between the two countries are recognized as role models. China has also cooperated in Bangladesh's economic development, building economic infrastructure, trade, agriculture, industry, and defense.

Bangladesh's geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic position is such that it has become an essential country in the regional strategic field (Avia, 2017). Even in global strategic terms, Bangladesh's position is significant. Bangladesh is considered to be the south Asian bridge with Southeast Asia. Bangladesh is located between the two largest countries in Asia, with a rising India. The other is China, which has already been ranked as the second-largest economy in the world. Bangladesh's geostrategic significance has risen dramatically due to

its placement on the Bay of Bengal's coast. The Bay of Bengal serves as a link between the eastern Indian Ocean and the countries that lie above it. The Bay of Bengal provides trade connectivity from China to West Asia and Africa in the west. Furthermore, all water routes in this region run through the Bay of Bengal; the strategically significant Malacca strait and Taiwan have been linked to the strait and now stretch to the South China Sea, East China Sea, and Pacific Ocean (Karim, 2017).

The geopolitical importance of Bangladesh has been noticed by major powers. The most important of Bangladesh's geopolitical assets or important positions is Bangladesh's location around the Indian Ocean. It is also important to China because of the geographical location of Bangladesh, especially the position of India as the most powerful country in South Asia. China even wants to consider Bangladesh as its substantial economic and strategic partner to build a strong position in the region against its other arch-rivals, the United States and India. Economically, China is one of the major trading partners of Bangladesh. Trade between the two countries has increased by 37 percent. For decades, China has chosen Bangladesh as its import-dominated state (Kabir, 2017). China has even provided quota-free access to various products in Bangladesh. Moreover, China's relations with Bangladesh are not far behind in military terms.

CHINA-INDIA RELATIONS

It is one of the most complicated relationships globally, but it is also one of the most important for peace and collaboration throughout Asia. India and China are rapidly preparing to become the political and economic superpowers of the twenty-first century. There are certain major irritants that include, the border dispute, the Dalai Lama's presence in India, military build-up along the border, and history of tense relations. These are obstacles to the healthy expansion of bilateral ties, "in the realm of economy", China and India's relations are both competitive and complementary (Rehman, 2017). The two countries are the world's two most significant marketplaces and two of the world's fastest-expanding economies. As a result, they compete for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and export promotion as job-creation tools.

On the other hand, China is well ahead of India in terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), exports, and other economic metrics. Our relations with China have steadily improved. Both countries see their relationship as one of global and strategic importance, which will last a long time and contribute to global stability. Mutual trust and confidence are growing among our personnel. India aims to engage closely with China in politics, commerce and economics, infrastructure, culture, and other spheres to raise the bilateral strategic partnership to a new level. Both countries have set a goal of having the highest bilateral trade. As a result, besides the well-trained bilateral ties between China and India, which are mainly based on their border disputes, these new challenges arising from their recent economic progress stimulate and perpetuate strategic competition between them. The Indian side claims that China's economic and security interests have resulted in a more fabulous Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean region, much to India's dismay, and that China has developed economic ties with the Bay's littoral countries through infrastructure projects such as port development, power plant construction, and railway and road construction. Chinese dominance in these Indian Ocean

outposts, Indian strategic planners fear, might turn them into military sites, allowing China to “encircle” India (Singh, 2019).

SINO-INDIAN INFLUENCE IN BANGLADESH

India’s mutual trust with other neighbors has reached such a low that now Bangladesh might declare that our relations with China are only commercial. Recently, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh said that India has nothing to worry about in China’s relations with Bangladesh. The Prime Minister described the Bangladesh-China relationship as a commercial one. Bangladesh will continue to maintain good relations with its giant neighbor while also wanting to benefit from the new strength of the global economy by maintaining relations with China which are expected (Hossain & Islam, 2021). However, Bangladesh’s trade and military relations with China are increasing. It could be a cause of concern for India. It has to be acknowledged that India’s connectivity with Bangladesh is hot now. India will never want to miss this opportunity. There is no doubt that India will desperately try to keep Bangladesh intact. For this, India will always want a friendly government to be in power in Bangladesh. India has gained experience from the elections in Nepal, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. It is in that experience that India will decide the policy on Bangladesh. In future, Bangladesh could be another area of China-India proxy war. Bangladesh will have to deal with the pressure from both sides. However, it remains to be seen how Bangladesh balances relations with India by maintaining relations with China. The following Tables and charts reveal how Chinese influence in Bangladesh is more substantial than India in the context of the economy (UN com database, 2021).

Table 1: Bangladesh’s Export and Import from China

Year	Import from China (USD)	Export to China (USD)
2016	14,300,635,412	869,397,551
2017	15,169,021,003	875,144,719
2018	17,759,539,782	985,405,469
2019	17,335,124,034	1,036,436,112
2020	15,060,011,401	799,614,401

Table 2: Bangladesh’s Export and Import from India

Year	Import from India (USD)	Export to India (USD)
2016	5,668,792,841	677,098,050
2017	7,210,099,516	591,575,732
2018	8,744,786,911	894,225,398
2019	8,242,923,366	1,036,436,112
2020	7,912,820,545	1,024,443,825

Source: <https://comtrade.un.org/data>



Figure 1: Bangladesh's Export and Import trends from China and India (USD)

The relationship between one state and another depends mainly on their history, geographical position, economy, politics, and the appearance of the international system (Josselin & Wallace, 2001). There are many interpretations of world politics. Realists believe that the polarization of the earth's power drives the largest power states. Strong countries maintain stability by building a balance of power. According to those who believe in the idea of a change of power, the period of dominance of one world power ends with the rise of another power, and the quiet and sustainability of world politics depend on the primacy of power, not on balance. The condition of today's world is complex. American power has weakened a bit, but military considerations show the world a polarity. China's growing rise, on the other hand, is particularly affecting Asian politics. India's foreign policy is mainly dependent on the evolution and interaction of these two forces. India's rise as one of the most extensive powers on the Asian continent has been built by acknowledging this major world politics trend. Whichever party is in power, there is no scope for a major change in foreign policy direction. The foreign policy followed by Narendra Modi shows four trends for now (Kumar, 2021). These are:

1. To further expand and strengthen the progress that has taken place in India-US relations in the last decade and a half. Despite differences between the two major democratic powers of the world over the desirable character and rules of trade and international order, the cooperation between the two countries in security, security, and liberal global economy has multiplied.
2. Despite differences on various issues, the top leadership of both countries has accepted that it is imperative to improve the relationship by maintaining dialogue between the two countries.
3. Enhancing the importance of Southeast Asia and Pacific countries in India's foreign policy.

4. Improving India's relations with neighboring countries within South Asia.

There has been a policy change in India's foreign policy. India is quick to increase its power in world politics. In this context, Modi is keen to re-evaluate relations with different countries. While power and multilateralism are two goals of India's foreign policy, Modi wants to implement a realistic foreign policy, prioritizing the economy's demands and military interests. China is the biggest challenge to India's foreign policy. During Narendra Modi's visit to China, a tug of war between the two Asian countries was noticed. Modi has worked with China for a long time; his image is positive, though it is unlikely to heal old wounds between the two countries. Modi has sought to increase the connectivity of the ordinary person of the two countries by announcing the e-visa plan, though there were doubts about the plan by Indian security agencies. India has opened up bilateral issues to China for discussion. India is even looking for a way to cooperate with China in nuclear and space research. How interested China will be in discussing and cooperating on these issues will significantly determine the dynamics of India-China relations. India's diplomatic influence in South Asia is dwindling. Taking advantage of this, China has extended its influence in the region far.

India and China are bound by economic obligations and military and political rivalries. Enmity or friendship is not an accurate description of this complex relationship. Recognizing the complex and deep multidimensionality of the relationship, India and China are pioneers in a friendly, risky coexistence, where the role of conflict of interest and cooperation is equal. It would be wrong to think of the relationship between these two countries as merely a bilateral relationship. The bilateral relations between the powerful states are formed in the same way that power distribution in the world system builds. Today's world is built on the framework of the dominance of US military power, but that power is not absolute. US foreign policy is burdened with hyperactivity. Even if the US economy comes out of a prolonged slowdown, it is impossible to revive its old dominance. Events in West Asia and North Africa prove that US military dominance may not work. On the other hand, China is quick to increase its military prestige by focusing on economic prosperity. To this end, conflicts with other countries no longer make Beijing defensive.

OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH

This paper has explored Bangladesh's economic and security options in Bangladesh's competition between China and India. Bangladesh-China relations should not be conceived of as a counterpoise or as a traditional balance of power arrangement in search of equilibrium against any other power. On the contrary, if the cooperation between China and India ensures or even, they continue their strategic competition, Bangladesh would like to be a conduit or a vibrating bridge connecting China to India and beyond. China's investment in Bangladesh's deep seaport, other mega projects, might strengthen the strategic relationship between China and Bangladesh for security cooperation. However, forging a more robust and comprehensive relationship with China, Bangladesh must address the caveats in the triangular relationship between China-Bangladesh-India. Bangladesh has to follow an independent and balanced foreign policy to pursue its national interests exclusively. In cases of taking decisions on different issues, Bangladeshi policymakers can involve civil society and decision-making.

As a booming economy, Bangladesh has moved beyond its image of textile production and is exploring new avenues in electronics, artificial intelligence apart from revolutionized agro-industries. Bangladesh can also use its energetic, skilled IT freelancers and make it a Service sector hub in the South Asian zone. It can also take lead roles in the Asian Development Bank and other multilateral financial platforms. Both China and India view it as an investment destination and arch-rivals in giving lines of credit. China being one of the top trading partners of Bangladesh has made India uncomfortable time and again, to which it announced a 5 billion dollar credit in 2017 (Chung, 2018). It can explore markets in India's northern and eastern states due to India's Act East policy. Analyzing these patterns, one can decipher that the economic preferences of Bangladesh are also dependent on its geopolitical situation where it is surrounded by India in three sides apart from the Chinese Belt and Road initiative, which has obligated Bangladesh with stringent conditions time and again. Therefore, it needs to maintain parity and treat India as its natural partner due to the civilizational ties that can leverage its international bargain. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) needs to be cultivated by Bangladesh to maintain its phoenix-like posture. However, India can be reminded that China has a large export base of arms sales in Bangladesh. Therefore, India needs to assure Bangladeshi cooperation in its indigenous military modernization schemes to maintain the security balance in the zone.

Bangladesh shares a long border with India. So, security is the main factor between Bangladesh and India. Bangladesh has a good trade relationship with India. Therefore, river or water-related issues are also important here. Bangladesh also has good relations with China. The leading sector, in this case, is trade. China helps in many infrastructural sectors in Bangladesh. There is growing amount of investment with India and China. Water bodies are vital for fishing, transportation, preventing natural calamities, improvement of Subregional markets and infrastructure. Bangladesh's geostrategic position in South Asia and beyond is pivotal. India is Bangladesh's neighbor, and both countries have colonial legacies and sociocultural similarities. In terms of security, Bangladesh should maintain cordial relations with India and China. Bangladesh has endorsed economic trade with India and China. No country can remain isolated in a globalized world from collaboration with neighboring countries and industrialized countries such as China, India, Japan, and Germany. As a result, it is a severe concern that the inflow of Rohingya refugees has posed a substantial security threat in this region.

The ongoing pressure on Bangladesh has gained momentum recently. The United States and India are trying to draw Bangladesh closer to join the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). Various diplomatic efforts are underway. On the contrary, China has threatened to withdraw from development cooperation, including deteriorating bilateral relations, if it joins the US-led QUAD (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2021). Moreover, diplomacy analysts call this situation a 'dilemma' or "double crisis" for Bangladesh. They claim that China has no option to keep Bangladesh's growing development in motion and solve the Rohingya crisis. Furthermore, Bangladesh has no way to side with the United States and neighboring India in world politics.

In such a situation, even though there is some difference of opinion among diplomacy analysts, they say that balancing will be the most important thing. In fact, without getting stuck, and the strategic advantage of geopolitical positions that Bangladesh has to be funded, the bargaining tool has to be made. The QUAD dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India began in 2007 to find ways to keep navigation in Indian and the Pacific ocean 'free and free' and China's claim to connect roads, naval, and rail with 70 countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe by implementing One Belt One Road (OBOR) is just the opposite. They say that even if the QUAD claims to be involved in economic work, it is not valid. The QUAD is a military alliance and is mainly done to oppose China.

China has made a veiled threat. China has said that QUAD will be hurdle bilateral relationship. It is natural because QUAD is an organization to handle China. However, it has not yet become a formal institution. On May 10, the Chinese Ambassador to Dhaka, Li Jiming said, "It would not be good for Bangladesh to join this four-member club because it will severely damage bilateral relations with China." Dhaka reacted strongly to the statement; two days later, on May 12, China reversed its tone by claiming that the threat was misconstrued due to poor English language. Ambassador Li Jiming, however, did not withdraw his statement. The threat from the Chinese envoy to Dhaka has not gone unnoticed, with the country's foreign ministry saying on May 12 that it is monitoring the situation. "We have earned about the comments from the Chinese Ambassador to Dhaka. We want to say that we respect the sovereignty of Bangladesh. We also respect Bangladesh's right to decide foreign policy," spokesman Ned Price said at a regular briefing by the country's foreign ministry (*The Diplomat*, 2021).

In development projects, it is clear that Bangladesh cannot avoid China in the current political and economic reality. China is assertive. If one looks at development projects, one sees China's stake, which is influential in our economy. Even in stock market, there is economic dependence on China for development projects. During Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Dhaka in 2016, OBOR was included in various agreements. At that time, Bangladesh was promised total loan assistance of USD 40 billion, of which USD 26 billion was allocated to build the infrastructure associated with OBOR (Ruma and Ben, 2016). Some of them are the Padma Railway Bridge and the Pigeon Sea Port along the Bay of Bengal. So, Bangladesh thinks about the future, and after the next 10 or 20 years, Bangladesh is not in a position to ignore China as an option. On the other side, similarly, India is closest neighbor and geo-strategically more critical. So, it is not possible to ignore neither China nor India. It is a dilemma for Bangladesh. It is noticeable that no one can replace Chinese cooperation in Bangladeshi development projects.

Sino-Indian rivalry in Bangladesh is a crisis for Bangladesh than at any time. In this case, if professionalism is given much importance, freedom is given to the Ministry of External Affairs, it will be easier for them to decide to balance it. Therefore, the state or the government needs to understand this situation. Bangladesh should be in a balanced position in this regard, and Bangladesh should have to go very carefully. A narrative has to be maintained. Bangladesh wants to stay away from the potential military component, the security component, because it cannot directly antagonize China. The QUAD cannot even solve the problem Bangladesh has

if it antagonizes China (Malik, 2016). Bangladesh should remember that foreign policy has to go the middle of the way, which has to stick to policy questions. Bangladesh need not join any alliance against any country. Bangladesh should consider its strengths, which have some strategic advantages. The kind of partnership it builds for India and the United States is for China as well. Bangladesh should use it as a bargaining tool now to create a balanced foreign policy. It would be wiser to follow a middle path than to give unilateral support or formally join somewhere.

Bangladesh is India's most dependable ally. India played a significant role in Bangladesh's liberation war, but unresolved concerns such as Teesta water sharing, border killings, and trade inequity have contributed to growing anti-Indian sentiment in Bangladesh. Due to the current BJP regime, one can see surge in communal activities in India. Also, controversial NRC law has outraged Indian public sentiment too. A Muslim majority country Bangladesh reacted to current regime's communal activities and NRC law. These are why anti-India sentiment is growing in the context of Bangladesh - India relations. It has mainly to do with the refugee problem and the water issue! The probable reason is that the relationship between the two countries is not always kept on an equal footing. However, perhaps it is more accurate to characterize this 'anti-Indian' sentiment as anti-BJP feeling in Bangladesh.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At present, China and India both have turn out to be the two vital factors to promote the international multi-polarization practice and to drive the monetary growth of South Asia. They are the two largest developing countries and emerging markets in the East with a vast number of populations as well as both have the most prominent ancient civilizations too. The influence of conflict, competition, and cooperation of the China-India relationship will continue to produce somewhat unbalanced power dynamics in Bangladesh. The outright conflict may be unlikely as both countries want peace and tranquility for economic prosperity, but friction between the two powers will remain until the primary causes of conflict are removed. The current Chinese and Indian headship must learn the shared collaboration. Bangladesh needs to implement a balanced and neutral foreign policy towards China and India to ensure its national interest. The geographic location of Bangladesh and being a member of SAARC and BIMSTEC on the one hand and part of the economic complex with China, both the powers will try to woo Bangladesh closer. Besides, Bangladesh has to steer clear of BRI's debt trap and maintain a robust middle power status. It has emerged as a leading economic power of the region too. China may open many investment options in Bangladesh to enhance business relationships. It can be said that Bangladesh can gain some benefits from the Sino-Indian clash. Thus, Bangladesh should make a balanced relation with these two countries. Both India and China seek to expand their influence in Bangladesh, so Bangladesh has the benefit of choosing the best card offered to it economically and politically. Bangladesh cannot simply maintain its sweet spot between India and China, as it is not in the long-term interest of Dhaka to act opportunistically. Inevitably, Dhaka has to take sides in developing its relations with either New Delhi or Beijing.

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