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Commemorating the Bangabandhu Birth Centenary

Rising Asia

January-March 2022 Issue- 18

Special Issue



Bangladesh-Russia Ties: 50 Years of Friendship Winning Against All Challenges



Russian Military Contingent Participated Bangladesh Victory Day-2021 Celebration



The Deputy Commander in-chief of the Russian Ground Forces Colonel General Alexei R. Kim met with Bangladesh Army Chief General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, SBP, OSP, ndu, psc, PhD on 15 December, 2021 at Dhaka Cantonment. *Courtesy: BSS*





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Bangladesh, Dhaka



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ঢাকা দক্ষিণ সিটি কর্পোরেশন
DHAKA SOUTH CITY CORPORATION
নগর ভবন, ঢাকা-১০০০।



শেখ হাসিনার মূলনীতি
গ্রাম শহরের উন্নতি

Goodwill Message



The relationship between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation (the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) is a historic one. In 1971, the Russian Federation supported the struggle of the people of Bangladesh for independence and was one of the first nations to recognize the new sovereign state. In the wake of our independence, the Russian Navy played a magnificent role in freeing the Chattogram port of mines and thus reviving its economic activities.

Currently, Dhaka and Moscow enjoying closer ties from energy to trade, investment to education, science and technology to cultural exchanges. So, Russia is a reliable and vital development partner towards the development journey of Bangladesh through its active participation in various development projects, including the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant.

The diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation were established on January 25, 1972. We are passing through a historic moment and happily expecting to mark the 50 years of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation in a befitting manner.

I am pleased enough to know that the Centre for East Asia Foundation (CEAF) is going to publish a special issue of "Rising Asia" magazine to celebrate the golden jubilee of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation.

I believe, this sort of exposure by the CEAF will open up new frontiers in our bilateral issues and dormant potentials to bloom to their fullest.

It is a matter of pride to me to pen down the message for this glorifying event.

I extend my warm wishes to all of the stakeholders who are working to deepen our bilateral ties.

Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu.

Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh
(Barrister-at-Law)
Mayor
Dhaka South City Corporation.



**Ambassador
of the Russian Federation
Dhaka**

Goodwill Message



It is my privilege to head the Russian diplomatic mission in Dhaka during the time when Bangladesh celebrates such remarkable dates as the 50th anniversary of Independence and the 100th birth centenary of the Father of the Nation and visionary, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. As the USSR was among the first to recognize the nascent country, we also mark the 50th anniversary of establishment of Russian-Bangladeshi diplomatic relations, which falls on January 25, 2022.

Russia has been considering Bangladesh a close and trusted partner since its first days as an independent state. The historic visit of a high-level delegation led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the USSR in early March 1972 was the starting point in our glorious journey. That visit resulted in a number of fundamental agreements which outlined the vistas for bilateral cooperation for years ahead. We are proud to note that mutual trust, respect and equality have always been integral elements of Russian-Bangladeshi ties.

Moscow and Dhaka attach utmost importance to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, share approaches to multilateralism, fair global financial and economic architecture and the dialogue of civilizations. Steadfast commitment of Bangladesh to the principle “friendship with all and malice to none” has secured it a unique place in the international arena as a responsible player with a long-term perspective and sustainable agenda. It was befitting for the UNGA to adopt a resolution on Dhaka graduation from the least developed countries in the year when the country celebrates its 50th anniversary and commemorates the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whose vision remains the guiding star for Bangladesh.

While cooperating at the UN on a broad variety of issues crucial for the global stability and prosperity, Russia and Bangladesh provide mutual support in other international fora. Dhaka’s benevolent efforts made possible the recent accession of Russia to the Indian Ocean Rim Association as a dialogue partner. Last September, your country joined the BRICS New Development Bank, thereby gaining new sources for national development and enhancing the global outreach of this important financial institution. The Non-Aligned Movement, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) are among other important international platforms where Russia and Bangladesh join hands in their aspirations for peace and justice.

Being a strong proponent of interfaith communication, Bangladesh has been actively participating in the "Russia-Islamic World" Strategic Vision Group since its inception in 2006. In November 2021, Chairman of Bangladesh Tariqat Federation Mr. Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandary traditionally attended the meeting of the Group in Jeddah.



Bilaterally, Russia and Bangladesh are keen to broaden cooperation and provide new dimensions to their ties. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic engulfing the world, the year 2021 was quite rich in engagements and developments of political and economic importance. Regular political dialogue was well on track, retaining its dynamic and substance. In July, 2021 Hon'ble Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Mr. Sergey Lavrov and Hon'ble Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh Dr A.K. Abdul Momen held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the international conference "Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity" in Tashkent.

September saw Hon'ble Chief Election Commissioner Mr. K.M. Nurul Huda visiting Moscow to observe the elections to the Russian State Duma (lower house of the parliament). The Russian Side was happy to share the experience and best practices in conducting legitimate and transparent elections in full compliance with national legislation and international law.

In October, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Hon'ble Speaker of Parliament of Bangladesh, attended the 3rd Eurasian Women's Forum in Saint Petersburg and addressed the plenary meeting with an insightful message. Later, a group of Russian and Bangladeshi friendship was established in the National Assembly of Bangladesh, reciprocating the similar mechanism existing within the Russian parliament.

The year 2021 also witnessed a number of economic achievements and breakthroughs. While in 2020 bilateral trade set a record of 2.4 billion USD, in the nine months of 2021 our turnover already crossed the mark of 2.1 billion. The Inter-governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, the backbone bilateral mechanism, held its third meeting in mid-December through videoconference. It brought together stakeholders and officials from all spheres of mutual interest to discuss current and promising new projects and areas for synergy.

Power is one of the key sectors of bilateral cooperation. Such major Russian companies as "Rosatom", "Gazprom" and "Inter-RAO Engineering" are implementing projects across Bangladesh, enhancing energy security of this country. Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant being constructed by "Rosatom" in the Pabna district is the most ambitious bilateral project. It saw a number of milestones in 2021, such as the installation of the first reactor pressure vessel inaugurated by Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the launch of the physical protection system construction. When commissioned, the NPP Rooppur will add 2400 MW to the national power grid, contributing to the government universal electrification plan and furthering Bangladeshi environmental agenda. The JSC "Gazprom" signed another contract to drill three more wells in Bhola. The Russian energy companies are engaged in modernization of the Siddirganj and Ghorashal thermal power plants built by the Soviet specialists.

While celebrating the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations, it is my strong belief that time-tested ties between Russia and Bangladesh and mutual affinity between our peoples will remain the solid foundation for strengthening cooperation between Moscow and Dhaka across various fields for many years to come. I wish you, dear friends, further success in your ambitious goals, prosperity and well-being.

Alexander V. Mantytskiy

Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Bangladesh.



Editor's Note



From demining the Chattogram Port to awarding scholarships for university students and constructing power plants that still provide a quarter of the country's total power output, Russia played a major role in helping Bangladesh find its feet after the South Asian country became independent. The relation between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation is significant, solid, and historic. Formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on January 25, 1972. At the time of our liberation war in 1971, Russia (The former Soviet Union) played a multi-dimensional role for Bangladesh. It would have been difficult for Bangladesh to gain independence in 1971 without the invaluable cooperation of the then Soviet Union in the international arena. If the Soviet Union had not vetoed the UN ceasefire proposal on Bangladesh three times in the last few days of the war of liberation, the course of history would have been different. Then we might have to fight a long war like Viet Nam. For this reason, the role played by the Soviet Union during the war of liberation will be written in golden letters in the history of the Bengali nation.

In May 1972, the Soviet Navy sent twenty-two ships of the Soviet Union's Pacific fleet to arrive in Chattogram from the Far Eastern port of Vladivostok. It took them about two years to complete the demining work and help in reviving Bangladesh's economy. The Soviet Union supported our reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts and the development of the economy. Some even died while clearing mines in Chattogram port. We have not forgotten those precious supporters' sacrifices.

In March 1972, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Moscow and thus laid the foundation which built a good traditions of firm friendship and cooperation between the two countries. During the visit of Bangabandhu, an inter-governmental agreement on economic and technical cooperation, trade, cultural, education, and scientific cooperation was signed. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid an official visit to the Russian Federation at the invitation of President Vladimir Putin in January 2013. This became the first visit at such a high level in the history of the bilateral relations between Russia and Bangladesh in the last 50 years. The cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh has always been comprehensive and has been developing in a wide range of spheres.

Currently, the two countries are working very closely in areas like energy, power, education, culture, agriculture, trade, and defense. The ongoing 2400 MW Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant is another milestone in the bilateral relations of the two countries. According to a 2016 report, almost a quarter of the total power output in Bangladesh comes from the Siddirganj and Ghorashal power plants, which were built by the Soviet Union in the mid-1970s.

Dhaka and Moscow are reliable, trusted, and time-tested partners in promoting principles of multi-polar global structure and a fair international economic and financial system. Holding close or similar positions on numerous international and regional issues, Russia and Bangladesh cooperate in the United Nations and other international platforms. The Russia and Bangladesh sides are always stressed their commitment to developing mutually beneficial and pragmatic cooperation, focusing on the long term, diversification of bilateral trade, increasing investment, and establishing joint-tech companies. There's still a lot of goodwill for Russia in Bangladesh and Russians must take advantage of this to tap the opportunities in the country. January 25, 2022, will mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation and certainly, it would be a historic moment. We hope that Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, following her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, will extend our mutual relation with Russia by retaining our own social, political and cultural harmony.

Best regards,

Nasim Mahmud
Chief Editor

Bangladesh-Russia Partnership: Rooted in History and Spreading out in Newer Directions

Professor Mustafizur Rahman



Bangladesh and the Russian Federation will be celebrating a landmark of historical importance on 25 January, 2022 – fifty years of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. By any reckoning, this is an event of crucial significance for both the countries whose friendship was established and forged during our war of independence.

To recall, USSR was one of the very first countries to recognise Bangladesh, soon after our victory on December 16, 1971. However, it will also be pertinent to remember that the USSR's principled and firm stand in support of Bangladesh and its people predates this milestone. USSR extended crucial support to Bangladesh's liberation war from the very beginning, when Bangladesh's independence was declared on March 26, 1971 by the father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. USSR had lent its strong voice and helped mobilise global opinion against the genocide which was being perpetrated by the Pakistani army and their cohorts and collaborators. When it was most needed, USSR exercised its veto power in the UN security council, successively on December 4th, 5th and 13th of 1971. This helped stall diplomatic initiatives by several UN members who called for a cease-fire at a time when our victory was on sight. The role of the 6th fleet of the USSR in thwarting the attempt by the US naval forces to intervene is now part of our history and legend. These are the reasons why the bond of friendship between the two countries and the two people is so deep rooted and firmly grounded.

It was the USSR which immediately after our victory took on the task of clearing the mine-laden Chittagong port, the lifeline of the newly independent country to the outside world. Beginning from April 1972, soviet naval forces

were engaged in demining of the Chittagong port, a work which took about 26 months to complete. Resumption of port activities enabled trade to take place, prevented acute shortages of essential goods for which Bangladesh was dependent on imports, and averted the likelihood of widespread famine in Bangladesh. It needs to be mentioned in this connection that the entire de-mining work was carried out by the USSR as a token of goodwill, free of cost.

It is thus not surprising that one of the very first visits of Bangabandhu, as head of the government, took him to the USSR, in the first week of March 1972. The bilateral relations got on to a solid footing thanks to this visit, with the USSR committing to help Bangladesh through various initiatives in the areas of economy, education and culture. Bangladeshi students started to go to the USSR for study in large numbers and on full scholarships. Cultural exchanges solidified the bond of friendship between the two peoples. Plans were on foot to deepen economic ties. Following the assassination of Bangabandhu and the tragic events of August 1975, many of the envisaged activities suffered a setback and were discontinued. However, the people to people friendship had weathered the dark patches of history, and it has been proved that the ties between the two people was not a hostage to inter-governmental relations, and was much deeper and more enduring.

As is known, during these years the USSR itself also went through tumultuous changes. However, as the successor country, the Russian Federation has continued to remain a close partner of Bangladesh, building on the legacy and history, with the bilateral ties branching out in recent years to newer grounds covering trade, infrastructure, energy, tourism and other areas.

At present, bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Russia stands at about US\$ 1.15 billion (with about US\$ 670.0



million of exports from Bangladesh and about US\$ 480 million of imports), significantly higher than what the figure was ten years back (US\$ 250.0 million in FY2011) and five years back (US\$ 520.0 million in FY2015). Bangladesh's major export items to Russia include knit-apparels (55.7 per cent of total export to the country) and key import items are cereals (57.8 per cent of total import from the country), minerals (10.5 per cent), aircraft parts (9.2 per cent), iron and steel (8.9 per cent) and fertilisers (6.2 per cent). Export to Russia accounts for 1.7 per cent of Bangladesh's total export, while corresponding share in Bangladesh's imports is 0.89 per cent.

It is felt that there are considerable opportunities for Bangladesh to take advantage of the growing Russian import market which in recent years stood at about US\$240.0 billion (2019). If Bangladesh is able to enhance its production capacities in producing manufactured goods (e.g., in medicaments, cement, equipments, vehicle parts etc.), which are imported by Russia in large quantities, and at competitive price, exports to Russia can be raised significantly, taking some part of the share from China which is its single most important trading partner and import source of Russia.

Regrettably, till now investment from Russia in Bangladesh has been quite negligible – only US\$ 1.35 million in FY2020-21 out of total FDI flow of US\$ 2.51 billion in FY21. Total stock of FDI from Russia, at US\$ 12.1 million at the end of June 2021 (out of a total amount of US\$ 19.95 billion), is also extremely low. In view of Bangladesh's plan to establish one hundred special economic zones and the expected investment and FDI flow to these zones, policymakers should energetically pursue investors from Russia to consider Bangladesh as a potential investment destination. A dedicated SEZ may be set up for such investment. Russian investment in Bangladesh targeting the Russian market should be prioritised in this connection. Bottlenecks inhibiting bilateral trade with Russia including those relating to conducting financial transactions should be looked into closely and attendant problems should be appropriately and urgently addressed. Steps should be taken to realise the opportunities identified in view of the 2017 Protocol for Intergovernmental Commission set up 'to review existing level of coopera-

tion, identify potential sectors and broaden the steps of future cooperation in prospective sectors including trade and investment, science and technology, education and research, agriculture, power and energy, food, ICT and manpower recruitment.'

One of the areas where Bangladesh-Russia ties has experienced notable development relates to the energy and exploration sectors. The Russian giant, Gazprom has signed MoU with Petro Bangla for exploration of gas and development of gas fields. Most importantly, the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation, ROSATOM, is currently extending technical and financial support to Bangladesh in connection with the construction of the two-unit nuclear power plant (with combined capacity of 2400 MW) in Rooppur, the first of its kind in Bangladesh. Till now about six thousand students have graduated from various academic institutions of the USSR/Russian Federation, who, on return to Bangladesh, have been making important contribution in various sectors of the national economy as highly qualified professionals.

Going forward, bilateral relations between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation has the potential to reach newer heights of cooperation and collaboration, in a diverse range of sectors and areas. Russia could be an important partner of Bangladesh as the country prepares to address the challenges of dual graduation, middle income graduation which has already taken place (in 2015), and the LDC graduation which is expected to take place in 2026. Economic cooperation, infrastructure building, trade, tourism, technology transfer, training of human resources as also cultural exchanges are areas which could be further explored, widened and deepened to the benefit of both the economies and the people, in a win-win manner.

As the two countries celebrate the jubilee year of establishing bilateral diplomatic ties, it will be pertinent to recall the roots of our friendship and the promises that informed this relationship at the dawn of our independence. Let us work, in all earnest, towards realising those promises over the coming years.

Professor Mustafizur Rahman, *Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka, Bangladesh.*



Russia's Contribution to Bangladesh

Some things in life are never forgotten

Selina Mohsin



I am a voracious reader of books of different genre. As a student of Holy Cross College I chaired a Literary Discussion Society with students interested in literature, We chose 'Crime and Punishment', by Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky. The novel moved me greatly and the character of Raskolnikov's sense of alienation

and profound suffering after killing two women was so acute, that it destroys Raskolnikov's mental capability. I was disturbed by the suffering, poverty and guilt and could not forget the novel for a long time.

Later I read "War and Peace" by Leo Tolstoy, a completely different type of novel. It provided wide panorama of Russian society against the backdrop of 1812 Napoleonic army invasion. Spirituality of the main characters and family happiness shows the ultimate award for suffering. Then, I went on to read a couple of other novels such as the gripping 'Anna Karenina' and subsequently "And Quiet Flows the Don" on the struggles of the Cossacks during the First World War, the Russian Revolution and Russian Civil War.

My idea of Russia was multifaceted. I loved Russian literature.

Later when I was in the Dhaka University reading MA in English Literature the Liberation war began. We were aware that between 1948 and 1960, East Pakistan made 70% of all of Pakistan's exports, while it only received 25% of imported money. . About 2.6 billion dollars of resources were also shifted over time from East Pakistan to West Pakistan. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman protested vehemently and thousands of others followed him on legitimate grounds. Soon, general elections were held and Awami League won a landslide victory. Mujib and the Awami League demanded autonomy for East Pakistan. This victory also gave Mujib the right to form a government, but Pakistanis refused to let the

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman become the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Mujib was arrested and flown to West Pakistan and imprisoned. West Pakistani soldiers invaded East Pakistan. There were widespread killings and other atrocities by West Pakistani armies. An estimated 10 million refugees fled to neighboring India. Bangladesh was in a precarious state. USA was Pakistan's ally.

On 13 June 1971, an article in the UK's Sunday Times exposed the brutality of Pakistan's suppression of the Bangladeshi uprising by Journalist Anthony Mascarenhas. His almost vivid news reports shocked the world by the injustice and cruelty of West Pakistan's policy and armed forces.

India decided to help the people of East Pakistan but India sorely needed to avoid a two front war situation. Indian troops from the China border were needed in the west on the Pakistan border. It is here that the Soviet Union came to our help.

In place of the usual deployment of 3-4 divisions, the Soviets deployed 44 motorized divisions on the Sino-Soviet border, creating a land threat to China. This has been documented by the reliable, 'International Institute of Strategic Studies', based in London.

Soviet Union stopped the attempt of Pakistan to terminate the Liberation war by giving veto twice in the Security Council of the United Nations thereby taking stand in favour of Bangladesh Liberation War. Soon, when USA, an ally of Pakistan sent the 7th Fleet to the Bay of Bengal then Russia deployed two groups of cruisers and destroyers as well as a submarine with nuclear warhead as a response to US presence in the area. From 18 December 1971 to Jan. 1972 the Soviet navy trailed the American fleet throughout the Indian Ocean. I heard all this from BBC channel from our battery operated radio at night.

We won our Liberation War mainly due to Russia, India's military aid besides our valiant freedom fighters



and our people's active participation against Pakistan's occupation army.

But there was an acute tragedy taking place in our own house in Dhanmondi in Dhaka. My brother Naseem Mohsin, brilliant scholar in the 1st year of English Department of Dhaka University was an iconic figure. A sensitive, believer of human rights and peace unexpectedly quietly left home after "Operation Searchlight". "Operation Searchlight" was the codename for a planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan Army in an effort to curb the Bengali nationalist movement in March 1971.

After the end of war on 16 December 1971, many freedom fighters returned but not my brother Naseem. Towards the end of December my father, Baba, was forced to seek help to find Naseem. He went to the Indian army headquarters and met Major Onkar Singh Goraya and Captain Sharma. Since Ammu was prostrated in grief Baba requested the young officers to come to our house to meet my mother and help her in her distress.

Ammu greeted the two Indian army officers with visible relief. She still had hopes of Naseem's return and now there were Indian army officers to assist Baba. Hospitable by nature, Ammu entertained them with sweets of many varieties and requested them to come regularly and help to find her son.

To assist in finding my brother the officers wrote a letter and gave an escort for Baba to visit camps of Freedom Fighters in Agartala, as Indian officers had found Naseem's name in a list. The search was fruitless.

A month or so later Major Onkar Singh Goraya came to visit Dacca. My mother insisted that he stay in our house and in Naseem's room. I called him Onkar Bhaiya and my mother seemed to find some relief in his genial presence. But soon Onkar Dada left.

At last Baba heard of a young man of Naseem's description who had been killed by a Pakistan Major on the Comilla border. He went there in our jeep with Naseem's friend, now Dr. Fakrul Alam, and others. After a search with the police they found the grave in a little village. The grave was dug open and Naseem's body was identified by Baba with means of a dental chart he had brought from his dentist.

A gory story was revealed by the locals. On 16 March, the

Liberation Day of Bangladesh a Razakar, who were local Biharis helping West Pakistan. They informed the Pakistani Area Major of a Freedom Fighter crossing the border to India. The Major arrived in his vehicle and caught Naseem who could not hide himself and shot him of 16 Dec. 1971- on the day of when Pakistan had surrendered and we were a free nation, Bangladesh. However, Ironic traumatic tragedy had occurred in our family.

The villagers did not know that Pakistan had surrendered and did not dare to bury Naseem's body. The body, once that of a vibrant and extraordinary character lay in the open, under the winter day and night skies. At night jackals sniffed it and hyenas walked round and ate part of his leg. An arm was wrenched off by a jackal. Flies buzzed over the body and hawks flew and picked out flesh from it. It was a horrible sight. Once a smart dresser, now Naseem's dead body lay in a dirty lungi, without an arm and with rotting flesh. Weeks later when the locals heard that Bangladesh was liberated they took the half eaten body and buried it near a farmer's front yard.

His death caused extreme pain to all family our members, especially to me. For me he is a star in the sky sparkling brightly even though we cannot see it in the lights of a city.

However, in 1972 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Russia for assistance on trade, economy, technical cooperation culture, education and scientific cooperation was signed. Former USSR assisted Bangladesh to revitalize its economy by helping in establishing power plants in Ghorasal and Siddirganj. USSR also helped in projects in Bangladesh with financial technical assistance and numerous scholarships on many subjects.

In the same year the first Soviet minesweeper entered the port of Chittagong. It took 26 months to clear the mines and recover vessels that were sunk. During this clearing operation, a senior sailor Yuri V. Rodkin lost his life as a hero. His grave is located on the premises of Bangladesh Military and Naval Academy.

I knew a great deal about Russia but I did not meet a single Russian. But years later in 2003 when I returned to Bangladesh after completion of my tenure at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London UK, I invited many diplomats to my place for dinners and usually invited the



Ambassadors of the Russian Federation. Amiable and friendly, they enjoyed the gatherings.

Gennady Trotsenko, a single person, arrived in Bangladesh as Russian Ambassador on 1st February 2012. A taciturn, shy man by nature, he had a long face, smooth hair, dark sparkling eyes and spoke English with a heavy Russian accent. We became great friends and spend hours chatting on Russia and interesting topics thus spending quality time together.

I invited Gennady many time to dinners at my place. He informed me that he had a PHD in Urdu. The reason why he chose it was because none of the probationers in his group selected it. He had to study diligently and got a PHD on the subject from Pakistan. Once he twinkled at me once and said “Urdu hai mera paheli pyar”, meaning that ‘Urdu is my first love’. All those present burst into laughter.

At the end of his tenure I gave him a farewell dinner. I was filled with sadness at the departure of my friend Gennady. Before he left he sent me many Russian gifts. He remains my friend. We exchange many emails and he never forgets my birthday. I grieved when one of his two sons passed away. Gennady seemed like a family member to me.

On every Christmas I sent him Christmas cards although Russian used the Julian Calendar and we the Gregorian one. The Russian Christmas is on 7th January I used 25th December for all my Russian friends. The idea was joy and merriment and not specific dates. Gennady is now writing his memoir.

After Gennady came Alexander Nikolaev on 10 February 2016. He was dynamic and different from Gennady. Alexander was quite a big man, with drooping eyes and a fleshy face. His hair reminded me of hedgehog, straight and short. But when Alexander smiled; his whose face beamed like sunshine. He was innovative, artistic and active.

He built a large theatre behind the Chancery where Russian songs, folk dances, musicians and pianist and many others came from Russia to entertain the Bangladeshis and diplomats. After each events food was served. Small tables dotted on the vast lawn and guests sat down to eat. Through Alexander’s cultural events one got to know many aspects of culture and life of the vast Russian Feder-

ation. Somehow we became special friends.

He sent my son Misha (Shahriar Feroze) to Moscow to write on the country and people. Misha’s writings were so entertaining that Alexander printed several hundred copies in the shape of a booklet to promote Russia on the National Day of Russian Federation.

Russians only entertain on National Days in hotels as they do not keep any local domestic help. In this, Alexander deviated from all Soviet/Russian Ambassadors. Once he invited me to a delicious lunch and another time he invited me and my son Misha, the Palestine Ambassador a few people to a warm and entertaining dinner. I shall never forget that enjoyable time. It was so entertaining and so warm among us few friends that the dinner remained an enjoyable memory.

Clearly I was his closest friend and he and his wife came to my home often for dinners.

There was a seminar prior to the National Day of Russia. He asked me to chair the session and I readily agreed. Their TV showed the Russian armed forces and hardly any of the western diplomats attended. That did not matter. Chinese diplomatic corp members were there. It was a lively seminar and we had a great time. Alexander thanked me and I said ‘Don’t thank me; I thank you for your questions and such a vibrant seminar’.

When he left it was a big wrench for me as his close friend. We corresponded by email. He has a Dacha near a river and goes boating with his daughter in the summers.

Recently he contacted coronavirus, I was very worried, but not Alexander. He recovered, got fit and is now bear hunting in the snowy deep forests!

The Russians are our allies and they have resilience of character, friendliness and we feel the essence of the vast country when we get to know them well. .

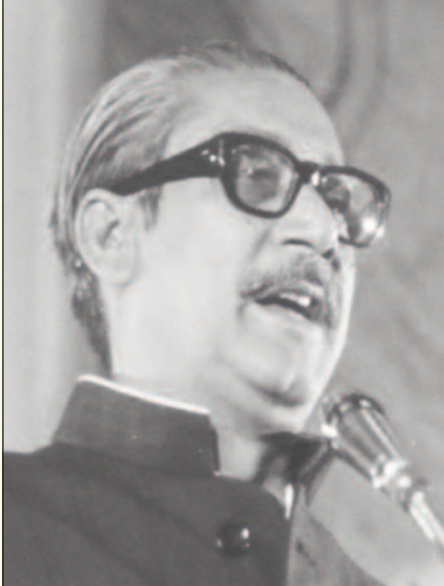
A new Ambassador of the Russian Federation arrived in May 2021. I have not met him as I had an accident and broke my hip joints and am unable to walk.

When I am fully recovered, I shall go and meet him I and know even more of my beloved Russian Federation.

The writer is a former professor and diplomat.

In Pictures: Bangabandhu in Moscow talking with the USSR Counterparts in March, 1972







Bangladesh- Russia Relations in an Evolving World Order: Past, Present, and the Future

Professor Shahab Enam Khan



We are living in a world that is evolving at a faster rate than civilization ever perceived in the last decades. Hence, the shape of geopolitics, geostrategic relations, and geoeconomics are evolving at an unprecedented pace. Bangladesh belongs to a region that is susceptible to both geopolitical shocks and geostrategic

miscalculations. South Asia has always been a region that received inconsistent responses and engagement from global powers. But one thing that the global economic system is now endorsing – South Asia has become the global economic hub, perhaps a financial and strategic powerhouse, in which the international community has much larger stakes than what they had in the past. Bangladesh is considered as an economic miracle and a geopolitical key point for the global powers since the Bay of Bengal's delimitation was completed. Bangladesh had to ensure its rights over the maritime boundary with Myanmar and India through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).

That means the country has set a precedence for the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes in Asia. It now hosts almost 1.1 Rohingya refugees at the cost of its national security and interests to show respect to humanity and civilizational norms. Unfortunately, this crisis can destabilize the region if the global community fails in responding to the root causes of the human catastrophe in Rakhine. This will be of no interest for anyone, a political but an unfortunate reality. We have once again have set a precedence of peaceful tolerance, which unfortunately often been interpreted as our weakness. This is exactly where I would like to bring Russia in.

For now, let us go back to history. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, During the Cold War, totally supported the struggle of the people of Bangladesh for independence and indeed was one of the First Nations to recognize Bangladesh as a sovereign state. We sincerely appreciate that. I must recollect the visit of the father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, then Prime Minister of Bangladesh, to Moscow from March 1 to March 5, 1972. His 11 member entourage included Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and Nurul Islam, Deputy Chairman of the first Planning Commission of Bangladesh, and they flew aboard a special Soviet airliner.

Bangabandhu represented a war-torn state with a failing economy that would require extensive reform, reconstruction, and restructuring. He met Leonid Brezhnev, then secretary-general of the central committee of the USSR Communist Party, along with USSR Defense Minister Marshall Andrei A. Grechko on March 2, 1972. Bangabandhu requested the Soviet leadership to assist in minesweeping of the Chittagong port and clearing it of sunk ships and vessels. By March 21, 1972, the Soviet delegation was already in Dhaka to work out the bilateral agreement on the minesweeping and clearing operation in the Bay of Bengal. All happened at lightspeed, showing Bangladesh as a key feature in the Soviet foreign policy. The first Soviet minesweeper entered the port of Chittagong on April 26 and completed the colossal task of cleaning the port in twenty-six months. I must recall the sacrifice of life Yuri V. Redkin. Sailor Redkin lost his life during this task; you must visit his grave situated on the premises of Bangladesh Military Navy Academy.

The USSR built the Ghorashal and Shiddhirganj power



plants in the 70s, still serving the country's power generation capacity, and provided technical and financial supports to set up manufacturing factories, i.e., electrical equipment, to the war-torn country. During his visit, Bangabandhu met Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny at Kremlin to discuss strengthening and developing friendship and cooperation between their two countries and international issues such as the Non-aligned movement.

An intergovernmental Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation and Trade Agreement to provide a multi-million-ruble grant of essential commodities and equipment to Bangladesh by the Soviet Union was signed too. This is perhaps the foundation of the agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on the Establishment of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation that was signed on March 1, 2017. We now have a USD1.6 billion trade profile with Russia. 90% of the Bangladeshi export to Russia, including RMG, seafood, and leather. But one should take note that this bilateral trade is generally balanced – the export from Russia is almost equal to the import from Bangladesh. Once labeled as "the Basket case," Bangladesh is now filling the economic and political baskets of the key global powers. This is where Bangladesh stands now.

Of course, I don't mean to paint a rosy picture all the time. Indeed, we have weaknesses too. Let's say the IT sector, or capabilities to maritime resource extractions in eco-friendly and ethical manners, technical and vocational education sector, financial governance and literacy, health and infrastructure. These are the areas where Bangladesh seeks to receive technical supports. Russia can be an important factor here.

I must stress that health security will continue to be a prime feature for countries worldwide for an extended period to come. We have to balance our economic goals and health security as the first thing during the post-COVID world. While the "vaccine nationalism" and the looming "vaccine crisis" will remain a critical factor in the geopolitical equations for now, or at least it will dominate the

world politics in 2021, the Russian vaccine against COVID19 undoubtedly can ease the looming crisis.

No doubt, the Russian Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation has become an indispensable partner in ensuring energy security. Rosatom is now constructing a 2.4GWe capacity Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant under the Intergovernmental Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on the Construction of the Nuclear Power Plant. Rosatom and Atomenergomash are building the VVER-1200/523 Nuclear reactor and critical infrastructure, and the 'Non-critical' infrastructure is being constructed by Bangladeshi and Indian construction companies such as the Max Group of Bangladesh and the Hindustan Construction Company of India. A \$12.65 billion contract has been signed in which 90% fund will be provided as a loan by the Russian government. I may remind you that the Government of Bangladesh started a discussion to build a nuclear power plant with the Soviet Union in 1974 though no agreement was reached during that time.

Going back to history again, Bangabandhu had an extensive meeting then Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin during his visit to Moscow. I read a news article published by the much-revered newspaper, the New York Times, dated March 1, 1972. The article published a glimpse of a conversation between Bangabandhu and Premier Kosygin. It said: At a dinner in the Kremlin the Soviet Premier expressed the hope that Sheik [Sheikh] Mujib's visit will lay the foundation on which to build good traditions of firm friendship and cooperation" between the two countries. In reply, the Bangladesh leader paid tribute to the "great revolutionary tradition that from the very beginning placed the Soviet Government and the Soviet people on the side of our struggle for justice and freedom." "Sheik [Sheikh] Mujib and other Bangladesh officials have publicly stated their gratitude for Soviet moral and diplomatic assistance last December when India helped Bangladesh gain independence from Pakistan, and the present four-



day visit to Moscow is partly intended as an expression of thanks."

Bangabandhu, in a television interview with Moscow Television, said that "Bangladesh needs help from friendly countries like the Soviet Union, but such assistance must be without any strings attached." When he visited the cradle of the Russian Revolution- Leningrad- Premier Kosygin accompanied him. Thousands of Leningrad people lined up throughout the 15-kilometer road from the airport to the city of Leningrad to greet the Bangladeshi leader. The weather was harsh, negative 3 degrees Celsius, yet people waited to greet the Bangladeshi leader. That part of history should be brought back. I must advise here that the academia and foreign policy circles should read the proceedings of the 1606th meeting of the UN Security Council, dated 4th and 7th December 1971. The representatives of Argentina, Belgium, Burundi, China, France, Italy, Japan, Nicaragua, Poland, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Syria, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom, and the United States were present in the meeting. The USSR PR to the UN, Ambassador Yakov Aleksandrovich Malik, mentioned in that meeting: "Because it [USSR] is interested in peace and tranquillity throughout the world, including the Indian subcontinent, the Soviet Union approaches the situation which has arisen there objectively and impartially, What is the cause of that situation, which, as I have already pointed out, nine members of the Security Council recognized in their official letter as a "deteriorating situation"? And who would dare to declare again, at this table, that the deterioration of the situation dates from December 3, and that all was well before that?"

The Ambassador further mentioned: "I submit that not one of the people now here would be so bold as to say such things. That is why the attempt of some speakers to close their eyes to the past, and to what has been happening at least since the beginning of this year or even since the month of March would be an ostrich-like policy, a pol-

icy of closing one's eyes to reality, a policy of hiding one's head in the sand. We disapprove of such a policy". He added: "Millions of people were forced to leave their homeland, to forsake their land and property and to flee to the neighbouring country of India, to become political refugees. That is a reality, and those are the facts. And anyone who closes his eyes to reality will have difficulty in finding the right way out of the situation". That's precisely what Bangladesh is doing for the persecuted Burmese.

On December 7, 1971, USSR vetoed the UN Security Council resolution twice that called for "immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of troops." Premier Kosygin directed the USSR permanent representative to influence the Security Council not to treat the situation as purely an "Indo-Pakistan" conflict. Hence the USSR, contrary to the popular rhetoric, was influenced by the causes of the struggles of the people of then East Pakistan, now sovereign Bangladesh, rather than great power game only.

Of course, the Cold War geopolitics played a critical role in the USSR's foreign policymaking, but the humane side of the socialist state philosophy played even a more significant role. Premier Kosygin, the prime leader in the making of "the Golden Era" of the USSR, promoted economic reforms, known as "Kosygin Reform" through eighth and ninth five-year plans between 1965 and 1975. Bangladesh was convinced by the success of the "Kosygin reform"; hence it influenced the Bangladeshi policymakers to embark on left-lenient economic policies.

Unfortunately, after the visit of Bangabandhu, no state leader or visited Moscow until 2013. on January 14, 2013, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Bangabandhu, paid an official visit to Moscow on the invitation of President Vladimir Putin - marking the first visit at such a high level in the past four decades. Prime Minister Hasina and President Putin held extensive discussions on various issues, including nuclear energy, defence cooperation, agriculture, education, health, culture, law enforcement, and counter-terrorism.

Earlier, in April 2011 and November 2012, Bangladesh foreign minister met then Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow. The state minister-level meetings were held in 2015 and 2016. The issues linking political dialogue, increased coordination in the global arena to maintain regional security and stability were featured in these meetings.

I must recall that on July 15, 2016, Prime Minister Hasina and then Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev met on the sidelines of the 11th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM11 Summit) in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. My understanding is that a summit-level meeting between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation in Dhaka would be necessary for stability in regional politics. Bangladesh remains one of the most politically resilient and economically stable countries in the region. At least, it is neither in war with any country nor has a futile ambition to disturb the regional stability. I assume I have taken a considerable time expressing my views and perhaps by revisiting the past and the present dynamics involving Bangladesh-Russia multi-faceted relations. Before I conclude, I would like to reminisce my childhood memories of Russia, which has a substantial influence of Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, and the Bolshoi

theater. I remember my parents used to take me to the Russian Embassy's cultural events, back in the 80s, in which Soviet opera singers or cultural troupe used to perform. Those were mesmerizing enough to occupy the mind of a young kid. The Russian sports delegations frequently visited Bangladesh, and my father used to take me to the gymnastics events. I still have an extensive collection of Russian pins from the past marking Lenin, Yuri Gagarin, Moscow Olympic games, and so on. I still have a Soviet watch with logos of Sputnik and CCCP. I am sure the Russian supports in the arenas of sports and culture will help Bangladesh in its pursuit against extremism or social volatilities. This is an area that deserves strong attention.

I may propose that more cooperation between the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, or the National University of Science and Technology, or the National Research, and the Bangladeshi universities will lead to more pragmatic research and a better understanding of society, politics, technologies, and foreign policies. Bangladeshi universities will welcome any such initiatives.

Professor Shahab Enam Khan, *Department of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.*



Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina Honored with Diploma Certificate from the Moscow State University for her brilliant speech.

(Date: 16.01.2013)



Prospect of Bangladesh-Russia Trade relationship

M S Siddiqui



The people of Bangladesh have strong admiration for USSR because of the valued support and contribution received from the people of the then Soviet Union during the Liberation War in 1971 and for the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts after independence. Soviet Union blocked the attempt of Pakistan

to stop the war of liberation by giving veto thrice in the Security Council of the United Nations against stop of liberation was and mutual settlement of crisis in East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Bangladesh forces finally defeated the Pakistani Army to free the country from occupation Army. Immediately, after war, Soviet Union also extended hands of cooperation to Bangladesh at post liberation period. The global opinion was in favor of Bangladesh due to strong support from the than super power like Soviet Union.

The USSR helped Bangladesh in revitalizing and developing its economy. In particular, the power plants namely Ghorasaland Siddhirganj, electrical equipment factory in Chittagong and other objects were built with financial and technical assistance of our country. Unfortunately, Bangladesh did not take it into their memory about that contribution of Soviet Union.

The major part of USSR is now Russia. Russia-Bangladesh economic and trade relations are based on the inter-governmental Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation and Trade Agreement, dated 1972. The relationship further extended with the agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on the Establishment of the Inter-governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation on March 1, 2017. The aim of the Commission is to develop broad-based cooperation between two countries in various spheres. It will facilitate the diversification of bilateral trade, economic, scientific and technical ties between the business communities of the two countries and as-

sist to remove barriers to mutual trade.

The data from Russia's Federal Customs Service reveals the volume of bilateral trade between Russia and Bangladesh crossed \$1.4 billion in 2016, almost double since 2012. It may be mentioned that in the last fiscal year 2020-2021, Bangladesh exported goods worth 665.31 million US dollars to Russia. During the same period, it imported goods worth 466.70 million. More than 90 per cent of the Bangladeshi import to Russia consists of ready-made garments, seafood and leather items. But Russia export metal-roll, raw materials for textile industry, machinery equipment, fertilizers, crops, including high quality milling wheat. It is important to note that our bilateral trade is generally balanced, the export from Russia is almost equal to the import from Bangladesh.

There may be cooperation in the sphere of trade and economic cooperation, power and energy, atomic energy, aviation industry, fisheries, fisheries and livestock, smooth banking transaction, geological research, information and communication technology industry, space and satellite and culture. Russia especially has a big market. The country's economy is blooming day by day and their purchasing power is also very strong.

Bangladesh cannot directly export its products to Russia due to tax related issues and other complications. Russia imposes a 20 percent tax on Bangladeshi products. Bangladeshi businesses also have to pay an 18 percent value added tax. Bangladesh currently exports its products to Russia through Germany, Poland and other European Union countries. Russia granted DFQF access facility to 48 Bangladeshi products as a least developed country (LDC). But most of these are not adequately produced here for export. So, Bangladesh is not getting benefit from the preferential trade arrangement in exporting its items to Russian market.

Bangladesh also lacks a proper banking channel with Russia for financial transactions, which hinders its export sector in that particular market. Bangladesh or Russia cannot go for opening Letter of Credit (LC), as the central banks of the states do not have any such bilateral provision.

Bangladesh also facing another obstacle due to the economic sanctions on Russia imposed by the US and the EU, performing business with Russian banks is not smooth and we want to establish such a payment arrangement between the two countries that businesspeople can run their business through private and public banks. Bangladesh also proposed that Russia become a member of the Asian Clearing Union so that we can make the payment under the intra-regional arrangement among the participating central banks but this is not a priority for Russia.

The sales policy of Russian enterprises to offer better price for advance booking of production or on spot payment by TT. In some cases, a very negligible amount of business between the two countries takes place through telegraphic transaction (TT). Bangladesh Central Bank also have restriction over payment by TT for import and need amend our Foreign currency law. Bangladesh importers paying addition cost of involvement of 3rd party for trade who are adding about 10-20% service charges for our business with Russia. Bangladesh may focus on Advance booking and import through TT for import at very competitive prices.

Bangladesh is now in global market for import of LPG and Russia is an important player in global gas market. Bangladesh can buy gas at a very competitive price by advance booking of future extraction as other countries are taking such advantage.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh is missing out on this huge op-

portunity for business because it lacks direct market access to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) among the countries under USSR. the Commonwealth of Independent States is comprised of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These countries have strict regulations for import, which is preventing Bangladesh from reaching their markets directly. If Russia allows Bangladesh direct access of its market, Bangladeshi products can be exported to other member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, said the participants.

Russia is such a country with whom all the countries of that region is cordially linked up through different types of regional and sub-regional cooperation is organizations. Bangladesh should also try to be a member of Euro-Asian Economic Commission, a platform of Russia, some CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and central Asian countries, to get more trade benefits. Although the scale of cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh is far smaller when it comes to business-to-business interactions, the private sector's mutual interest in exploring investment and trade opportunities is increasing. We need free trade agreement (FTA) to grab opportunities in that market. China, India and Vietnam have already signed FTAs with Russia and are doing very good business. We are late to sign FTA but let us follow China, Vietnam and India.

M S Siddiqui is a Legal Economist, Bangladesh.

PM Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Russian PM Kosygin after the signing of the Inter-Government Agreement in 1972.





Russia of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy

Brigadier General (Retd) AF Jaglul Ahmed



Upon the birth of the newly born state of Bangladesh, a dream carried right from 1948, its people found beside them the only great power during the war of liberation and immediate thereafter was the former Soviet Union. The greatest influence that the then Soviet Russia left

on the head and heart of the rising youth was its socialist modelled political philosophy. A class of youth with Marxist influence dreamt of a state in the model of Soviet socialism. Not only political philosophy, Soviet art, literature, films, etc. impacted on the rising youth heavily by Russia's support to economic and cultural enhancement. Educational scholarship, literary-cultural activities sponsored by the Russian culture center, etc. were the oxygen for larger urban society based on youth dream. Catherine the Great, Ivan the Great, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great etc. were all figures familiar to the urban youth. The history of Russia re-revealed to this youth as a concept dated back to the ninth century and a loose federation of East Slavik tribes known as Kievan Rus. Ivan the Terrible was the first Tsar, who gave Russia a vision of empire. In 1533, Ivan the Great expanded Russia on the east to Urals, south to Caspian Sea and north towards Arctic Circle. In Tsarist Russia, there was no bourgeoisie, and in general no true class-system but merely lord and peasants i.e. upper and lower class. The spirit of the upper class was western and the lower had brought in with them was the soul of the countryside. The foundation of Russian Empire in a European outlook was built by Peter the Great in the eighteenth century followed by Empress Catherine the Great to establish it as one of the great pow-

ers of Europe largely portrayed to the outside world by Leo Tolstoy. The primitive Tsarism of Moscow was the only appropriate form of Russia as Dostoyevsky dreamt of coming Russia. It was distorted by Peter the Great as dynastic form of Western Europe creating a false and artificial history that the soul of the Old Russia was incapable of understanding.

Russian novel, poetry, film, available both in English and Bengali translated form, wide opened the Russian art and culture to the energetic youth readers. Maxim Gorky, Alexander Belyaev, Alexander Pushkin, Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky influenced the youth to a great extent. There was none of that age could be found to not read the translated version of Gorky's *Mother*, *Childhood*, *My University*, etc. The 'Mother' loosely based on the 1905 revolution depicting long sufferings of a mother and her son Pavel, a devout comrade of revolutionary socialism sensitised the youth of the time. Alexander Belyaev's translated copy of 'Amphibious Man' portrayed a strange creature who could live both at marine and human environment, when captured revealed truth far more tragic and complex. Nothing could be more sensational than 'Idiot' of Dostoyevsky, which was staged by the then drama society. The Novel portrayed the consequence of an individual at the centre of conflicts, passions, desires and egoism of worldly societies. The innocence or ignorance of the central figure was not necessarily the same as he could hide one from the other. Much later 'War and Peace' by Tolstoy could also induce a section of youth of other camp. Western art and science, enlightenment, social ethics, materialism of world cities were thrust upon over the soul of pre-cultural people of Russia, who understood himself and of the world through

the language of religion only. What inspired the urban youths to read Russian history and art and culture so widely- was its societal structure vastly comprised of two classes of souls, urban and rural. The history of Russia revealed by Dostoyevsky attracted the youth more than what Leo Tolstoy portrayed. Dostoyevsky, one from peasant class influenced by religion, was fundamentally unaware of the materialistic world and lived in a metaphysical world beyond. Tolstoy was taken as a megalopolitan and western form of problem that the post enlightenment western civilization offers. The dichotomy in the history of primitive and of modern Russia based on enlightenment enthralled the energetic youths as it captured their hearts of living in a history of void for a journey to a new.

The youth bled afresh in the war in 1971 impelled the new nation to put socialism as one of the four pillars of constitution amidst dilemma in the framers of constitution.

Two out of the four pillars of the constitution i.e. democracy and socialism conflicted in application since the two have two different principles in the statecraft under international order. Initial political divide between the two principles and eventual survival on the former principle had far more consequences. Oblivious to the consequence, there are still dreams alive in the living generation of the then youth for a state blended between democracy and socialism, which is to live not only in the modern world but also to spread the progress of democracy as share of every peasant. How the philosophy of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky would be blended by someone is to be seen in the current and coming Bangladesh.

Brigadier General (Retd) AF Jaglul Ahmed is an Executive Director of New Asia Group. He ended his long colourful military service of 33 years blended in command, staff and instructional post. He has in his credit numerous writings in national dailies and of national and international journals.

Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina was welcomed by the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mr. Igor Vladimirovich Margulov at the Moscow Sheremetyevo International Airport in January, 2013.





An overview of Prospects of Industrial cooperation between Bangladesh and Russia

Engr. Sheikh Faezul Amin



On the occasion of the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence and the 100th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh has attained the requirements of all the three indicators for being middle income developed country under the charismatic and dynamic leadership of hon'ble Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, MP. Under her right leadership we will also achieve the status of higher middle income developed country by 2031 and will enjoy the status of developed country by 2041.

Industrialization is one of the important pre-requisite for rapid and sustained economic development and social progress of a country. Industrialization is the process in which a society or country like Bangladesh transforms itself from a primarily agricultural society into an industrial one based on the manufacturing of goods and services. The industrial sector has historically been the sector that has driven growth as countries have moved from low to middle and onward levels income status. This is because industry can provide high-wage employment for large numbers of workers and can raise social productivity by producing high-value services and goods on a mass scale. There are lot of prospects in the industrial sector of Bangladesh that can positively contribute in the economic and social development. This is why the Government of Bangladesh has taken a number of diverged programs in this sector for its economic and social development.

If we look back in 1971, with the liberation war of 9 months, Bangladesh became a sovereign country. After the war, the country was left in dreadful states, the industrial development was very slow. At that time former Soviet Union (Russia) supported the struggle of the people

of Bangladesh and one of the first nations to recognize the new sovereign country. During 1972-74, Russia extended its helping hand to Bangladesh in reviving its ruined economy during the Liberation war. The first highest and high level visit took place between Russia and Bangladesh at that time led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Prime Minister and Abdus Samad Azad, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh and where they signed an intergovernmental agreements on economic and technical cooperation, trade and trade representation, cultural and scientific cooperation, on providing free assistance to Bangladesh for reinstating navigation in its seaports, as well as on air services between our countries. This was considered being the first step for improving bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and former Soviet Union (Russia).

Trade is a key tool of development that has led to globalization. Bangladesh and Russia are enjoying a healthy growth in terms of trade and commerce. But both sides have much more to offer. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and Federal Agency on Technical Regulating and Metrology (GOST-R) might be signed by the concerned of both the countries. It would further expedite the bilateral trade between the countries and the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and Federal Agency on Technical Regulating and Metrology (GOST-R) has been sent to Russia through Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) for further necessary course of action.

Bilateral trade between the two countries has increased considerably in last few years. Bangladesh mainly exports apparel items, jute, frozen foods, tea, leather, home textiles and ceramic products to Russia. But there is a huge scope for export of sea foods, potato and pharmaceutical prod-



H.E. Ambassador of Russia Mr. Alexander Mantytskiy called on hon'ble Industries Minister Mr. Nurul Mazid Humayun MP on September 8, 2021.

ucts in Russian markets. The country's imports from Russia include cereals, minerals, chemical products, plastic products, metal, machinery and mechanical equipment. Russia can export capital machineries, fresh and dried fruits and raw sugar. Russia is also extending their technical and financial assistance to construct the country's first ever nuclear power plant having capacity of 2x1200 Mega Watt in Rooppur, Pabna, scheduled to be commissioned in 2024.

Investment is the lifeline of our economy and investment promotion has been designated as one of the ten special initiatives of our country. High Investment is required for rapid industrialization. Investment from Domestic entrepreneurs and FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) from friendly countries can contribute huge in this sphere. Bangladesh offers its large domestic markets, strategic location, high profitability, demographic dividend, hundred special export processing zones and conducive policy incentives in terms of financial and legal affairs that focused the country as one of the most preferred investment destinations in the world.

Foreign Investors from Russia might invest in Ship Building, Leather, Fertilizer, Cement, Blue Economy, Light Engineering, Active Pharmaceutical Industries, Economic Zones. Triple Super Phosphate (TSP) fertilizer, Di Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) fertilizer, Urea fertilizer, Cement and Paper factories. Sugar mills under Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC) have the opportunity to set up modern 'Agro-Based Industry' on their own land under PPP / Joint Venture with investors from Russia.

H.E. Ambassador of Russia Mr. Alexander Mantytskiy called on hon'ble Minister Mr. Nurul Mazid Humayun MP, Ministry of Industries on September 8 this year. They discussed the bilateral issues. Hon'ble Industries Minister asked H.E. Ambassador of Russia about the conducive environment for investment in terms of policy incentives and other offerings. He requested to extend Russian technical and financial assistance especially in leather, Complex Chemical Fertilizer and Agro-based food processing industries. He added any assistance from the Russian side in the form of consortium Investment or Joint Venture interventions in those fields would be mutually beneficial



for both the country. H.E. Ambassador of Russia suggested to forward this proposals to discuss in the forthcoming Bangladesh-Russia Inter-Government Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation.

At present Bangladesh and Russia are enjoying a very good bilateral relations. Signing of Agreement on Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investment between Bangladesh and Russia is underway. This agreement would give more confidence to the investors of Russia. Bangladesh have been informed from Russian side through Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) that they have recently adopted a new approach in concluding international agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment and therefore the earlier draft Agreement has to be redrafted and renegotiated. Renegotiation on the said draft might be recommenced in the forthcoming Bangladesh-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation.

This is the era of 4th Industrial revolution(4IR). The world is currently in a technological transformation that would essentially change the way we live and work. Tech-

nological advancement and convergence of technologies are increasingly supporting global manufacturing competitiveness. Nations are now increasing their focus on developing advanced manufacturing capabilities by investing in technological infrastructure and quality skill. This is why we have to take the advent of technological competitiveness and excellence from 4IR for development of our industrial sector.

In conclusion, Russia is our trusted friends since independence. Being developed country Russia has undergone almost all the technological advantages of 4IR. A Joint Steering Committee(JSC) and Joint Working Group(JWG) might be formed between the two countries to explore in this regard. Russia might be requested to extend their technical expertise and financial assistance for taking the challenge of 4IR and effectively use it for the development of our industrial sector that would help us overcoming the challenges of graduating to a developed country as well.

Engr. Sheikh Faezul Amin is an Additional Secretary, Ministry of Industries, Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh.

The USSR provided humanitarian aid to Bangladesh during its War of Independence in 1971.

Courtesy: George Hadezhdin/TASS



Russia – a real friend of Bangladesh!

Dr. Debashish Chanda



When I came to know that ‘Rising Asia’ journal is going to publish some articles on Bangladesh-Russia friendship as going to celebrate 50 years, have agreed to write something on this true relationship of two countries. But right after that, I have started thinking what I should write about as there are so many

things, too many connections in between two countries especially for us who studied there and lived there for long. For us, it is whether Soviet Union or current Russia or any other of those countries, is the second home, Russian language is the second native language and Russian people are not only friends but close relatives for us.

It was August 1985, when started my journey to Russia for study, I was only 18, but confident in that country and people as we knew from the history and culture that they are friendly people. With some other students, I arrived in ‘Shermeteevo’ International Airport, Moscow and it was surprising that there were some Russians and Bangladeshi students to welcome us. Then we were brought to an International students’ hostel for two days and then were sent to different cities where we should admit to the universities and start our language courses.

I started my journey from Moscow to Krasnodar by train with another Bangladeshi student who was also a newcomer and none of us knew a single word in Russian, but the train journey was for almost two days. I still remember the smiling faces of those compartment attendants’ ladies and the passengers who were so kind to us when they realized that we are new in this country and can’t speak Russian. They were helping us understand everything without speaking English and we were also trying to understand, it’s happening only when you are surrounded by good people, so, since that beginning of my journey, I

have continued experiencing this feeling of a fantastic nation till to the end of my stay in Russia-the country of Alexander Pushkin, Sergei Yesenin, Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky. There are many famous writers and poets of Russia who are renowned in whole world for their legendary literature works and we were lucky to read those in Russian.

My university, Kuban State Agrarian University was one of the largest in Soviet Union and current Russia, even in that Eurasia region. It was located in the southern, agrarian and evergreen city Krasnodar, was named by the name of the famous river Kuban. Krasnodar region was/is always famous as a food basket of Russia where farmers are growing almost all crops including rice.

Right now, the Krasnodar Region is one of the leading Russian agricultural and food-production centers. The agricultural land in the Krasnodar Region makes up 10% of the agricultural land in the entire Southern Federal District. The plains comprise mostly black soils—with a total area of 4.8 million hectares, i.e., over 4% of Russia’s and about 2% of the world’s reserves – characterized by its dark color, friability, good structure, richness in minerals and provision of high crop yields. The natural conditions facilitate the planting of a full range of temperate and sub-tropical crops. The region regularly leads Russia in the production of grains, sugar beets, sunflowers, fruits, berries and grapes. Krasnodar region holds the 1st in Russia for the volume of gross agricultural product.





The higher education system of Russia is represented by more than thousands of universities of which 17 universities located in Krasnodar, which offer more than 300 study programs including medical, engineering and agriculture. There are many Bachelor and Master programs at 14 universities and PhD programs at 7 universities. International students looking to get a higher study in Krasnodar can choose from a diverse range of programs and diplomas and obtain their Bachelors, Masters and PhD (or MBAs) from some of the top-rated institutions in Russia.



I earned my BSc (Ag), MS (Ag) and PhD (Plant Breeding) from the Kuban State Agrarian University. It's a massive area with many campuses, administrative and faculty buildings, hostels and with a vast botanical garden. When we started learning the language, it was so difficult as we didn't know anything, just starting from "A", but the extensive care and kindness of our teachers don't give us to feel those difficulties. We still remember those respected teachers who taught us as parents teach their children with such care that we didn't realize that we already started speaking and writing in Russian. Students from all continents were studying in our university, as far I remember there were students from more than 40 countries from though mostly from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

From Bangladesh, when we were three newcomers in the preparatory faculty (for language course), there were three students in the graduation courses and three seniors in the PhD research. There were also Bangladeshi students in the Medical Institute, Engineering Institute, State University and in the Polytechnical Institute in Krasnodar. Every year some new students were coming from Bangladesh and some are return back to home after completing their study, so, it was like a joyful journey and



meeting new people and say goodbye to some others. Russia provided scholarships to Bangladeshi students for higher studies since the liberation of Bangladesh to support the newly born country in education. Over five thousand students from Bangladesh have graduated from Russian institutions/universities of higher education. Now they work almost in all spheres, including governmental bodies, International Organizations, and private business. The Soviet & Russian Alumni Association of Bangladesh unites all those who studied in current Russia and other countries of Soviet Union.

Russia and Bangladesh started to develop friendly and mutually beneficial ties in the early 70s, from the very first days of Bangladesh as an independent state. The people of Russia at that time raised their voice against the atrocities being committed against the people of Bangladesh fighting for their freedom in 1971. That was not simply a political decision but the manifestation of deep and sincere sentiments of our people who were always supportive of national-liberation movements all over the world. Immediately after the liberation war, Russia (Soviet Union) extended its political support to Bangladesh to facilitate its admission to the UN. On January 25, 1972, our countries exchanged notes on establishing diplomatic relations. Later, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) also assisted Bangladesh in joining the United Nations (UN). In 1972-74, the Soviet Union extended its helping hand to Bangladesh in reviving its economy, destroyed during the Liberation War. At that time, the first highest and high-level contacts took place between Russia and Bangladesh. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad visited the USSR where they signed intergovernmental agree-



ments on economic and technical cooperation, trade and trade representation, cultural and scientific cooperation, on providing free assistance to Bangladesh for restoring navigation in its seaports, as well as on air services between our countries.

Since then, till to date the friendship between two friendly countries are continuing to flourish. On January 14-16, 2013, our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid an official visit to Moscow on the invitation of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. This became the first visit at such a high level in the history of the bilateral relations between Russia and Bangladesh in the last 40 years. Vladimir Putin and Sheikh Hasina held extensive negotiations on numerous issues of bilateral and international agenda. Three intergovernmental agreements were signed covering credit cooperation and six memoranda of understanding in different spheres: i.e., nuclear energy, military hardware supplies, agriculture, education, health, culture, justice and counterterrorism. Russia-Bangladesh economic and trade relations are based on the intergovernmental Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation and Trade Agreement, dated 1972. There is many industrial cooperation between these two countries ongoing, especially in the power sector. “Rooppur” Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) is one of the biggest power plants currently under construction and Russia provided an amount

of almost 12 billion USD credit to Bangladesh for this establishment of “Rooppur” NPP.

Bangladesh-Russia friendship is not only bounded with trade and industrial cooperation, but there is also a close collaboration on cultural events. Cultural cooperation is one of the most actively developing spheres of the Russia-Bangladesh relationship, contributing to better mutual understanding as a non-material basis for the bilateral relations. The Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Dhaka regularly organizes cultural and educational programmes (lectures, exhibitions, film shows, meetings of alumni of Soviet and Russian universities, etc.). Cultural interaction between our countries has also become more active these days. Few years back several Bangladeshi dance groups visited Russia to take part in various international festivals and Russian cultural groups are visiting Bangladesh frequently.

Many Bangladeshis are now living in Russia in different cities with their families and many Russians are living and working in Bangladesh right now. This extended friendship between two countries has been growing fast and taking into new horizons. Russia with its culture, hospitality, beauty, and love has been attracting foreigners since long and still the tradition of welcoming newcomers are well practiced. Anyone can come and explore the lifestyle of Russia and will be amazed and impressed by its simplicity. It's been long since I returned to my home country and living here but still, I remember all those days of my student life and all those people I met there, it was really a fantastic period of my life. In my dream I wish again to go to Russia and meet my friends and visit all those beautiful places. I wish both Bangladesh and Russia prosperity, success, and happy friendship forever.

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Dr. Debashish Chanda, *Country Program Coordinator, International Potato Center (CIP), Bangladesh.*



We shouldn't forget our true friend Russia

Shah Abdus Salam



I am delighted to write a few words on the occasion of 50th anniversary of friendship between Bangladesh and Soviet Union. The relationship between Russia and Bangladesh was established through a historical process based on our war of liberation in 1971. As a citizen of Bangladesh I must say; Bangla-

des's relations with Russia are historic. Citizens from Bangladesh and Russia can recall Russia's contribution to the great liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. It would have been difficult to achieve independence without the active cooperation and support of the Soviet Union during the creation of Bangladesh. Without some background information it would be difficult to describe this historical relationship with Soviet Union and birth of a nation, Bangladesh.

In 1970's parliament election of Pakistan, under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Awami League elected with absolute majority in the parliament. The indefinite postponement of the scheduled session of the National Assembly due to be held on 3 March 1971 at Dhaka and the failure of the military government of General Yahya Khan to transfer power to the elected representatives led to widespread public resentment in East Pakistan. Protest and demonstrations were held in Dhaka, Chittagong and other cities. The army resorted to open fire on demonstrating crowds in different cities and towns. With the guidance of Awami League chief Bangabandhu, civil disobedience movement was organized all over the country. Bangabandhu dreamed for freedom of Bangladesh from 1948 because he believed that no nation can form on religion only, without any cultural ties. The distance between two states East and West Pakistan was 1200 miles far away. Bangabandhu was a visionary leader

and he slowly organized whole nation for liberation step by step and finally on the 7th March 1971, when the whole nation looking to the great leader to declare independence of Bangladesh; Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a historical speech in front of millions of people that "Abarer Sangran Amadesr Muktir Songram, Abarar Songram Amadesr Shadinotar Songram. Tomader Ja Kishu Asha Tai Nea Prostut Thako, Rokto Jokhon Deasi, Rokto Aro Dibo, Adasher Manushka Mukto kora Sarbo Inshallah".

The government lost grip on the administration. Genocide started with the army crackdown in Dhaka at midnight of 25 March 1971. The army cordoned Peelkhana, the headquarters of the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR), Rajarbagh police barracks, Dhaka University and the Ansar headquarters at Khilgaon. More than 800 EPR men were first disarmed and arrested, and many of them were brutally killed. A few hundred of them, however, managed to escape and later joined the liberation forces. Bangabandhu was arrested by the Pakistani army and was taken away as prisoner in West Pakistan. Senior leaders of Awami Ledge and Student leaders fled to India to organize training for freedom fighters and formed Bangladesh government in 17th April at Mujibnagar, Meherpur headed by Shahid Syed Nazrul Islam (Acting President) and Shahid Tajudding Ahmed (Prime Minister). Ten million people from East Pakistan fled to India as refugees.

In this situation India sheltered 10 million of Bengali, arranged food, clothing, treatment and all the humanitarian assistance to our people and arranged training and arms for freedom fighters. Most of the arms came from Soviet Union. India took a huge risk because Soviet Union was beside them. That time Soviet Union's role was to support struggling countries around the World. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation was a treaty signed between India and the Soviet Union in August 1971 that specified mutual strategic co-



operation which sent a strong signal to opposing nations such as USA and China. This was a significant deviation from India's previous position of non-alignment during the cold War. The treaty was necessitated by increasing Pakistani ties with China and the United States of America and played an important role in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. The duration of the treaty was of 20 years and it was renewed for another 20 years. We had a diplomatically strong support from the Soviet Union globally and especially in the United Nations. After lengthy discussions on 7 December, the United States made a resolution for "immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of troops". While supported by the majority, the USSR vetoed the resolution three times when USA moved their seven fleet towards East Pakistan to protect Pakistani killing mission to Bengali nation.

Genocide by Pakistani army and their collaborators during the WAR OF LIBERATION in 1971 is now well documented. However, no definite survey has yet been done to ascertain the exact number of people killed by the Pakistan army. Immediately after the War of Liberation, it was estimated to be as high as three million. The genocide committed by the Pakistan army is one of the worst holocausts in human history.

After sacrifice of three million lives and sexual assault on two hundred thousand mother and sisters we liberated our nation in 16th December 1971. Pakistan army surrendered to Freedom Fighter and Indian army on 16th December 1971. After the war of liberation, the war torn country needed to rebuild. Bangladesh received huge support and cooptation from the Soviet Union especially demining operation by the USSR naval force, reconstructions of totally damaged communication network of the country, generating electricity, providing helicopters for relief operation for our people.

So in this historical context; Soviet Union is most trusted close friend of Bangladesh which Bengali nation shouldn't forget and our responsibility is now to strengthening our historical friendship in this geo-political polarization period around the globe. In 15th August 1975 brutal killing of our father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman, his family members (except two of his daughters who were in Germany that time), later killing of the most trusted four national leaders in jail by the military backed by the same national and international evil forces (Pakistan and imperialist agents), the core principals of the state had been destroyed and relationship between our trusted friend countries had been reversed and ignored.

After a long struggled Awami ledge came back to power again under the leadership of Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina in 1996 and again in 2009 to till date. The present govt. is rebuilding the relationship with our historically trusted friendly countries around the globe including Russia. Now we have a very good bilateral relationship between Russia and Bangladesh govt., some top national priority mega projects are going on like first nuclear power plant in Rup Pur with the support of Russian govt.. We have received security equipment's like arms for the army, Mig fighter jets and helicopters for air force. Business is growing between two countries but there are many more opportunists needed to be explored for Bangladeshi products to Russian market. So economic cooperation needs to be increased between the friendly countries.

Russia's cultural ties with Bengal were established in the eighteenth century. The first Bengali play was staged by Russian playwright and explorer Gerasim Lebedev with the help of local intellectuals, Lebedev also established the first European-style Theater in Bengal. In addition, Lebedev wrote a short Bengali dictionary, wrote a book in Bengali on arithmetic, and translated parts of the Anandamangal poem into Russian. Leftist politics and Marxism in our country was also popular among the young generations though Communist party, outlawed by the Pakistan government. But they continued their work from the underground. Translated novel of Maxim Gorki's Ma was a very popular book for youth that time. After the liberation I have seen many Russian cultural delegations visited Bangladesh even in the different district level but over the period cultural exchange has been reduced which need to be increase to establish people to people relationship through cultural exchange programmes.



After the birth of a new nation Bangladesh, many of our scholar students got opportunities for higher studies in Soviet Union, they came back home end of their study to contribute their new born country. But unfortunately after the changing situation of 1975 killing of Bangabandhu, rightist army junta and army backed govt. didn't recognize those scholars. So many of our scholars were demoralized and left the country and settled in USA and other western countries. Still the Russian government is providing scholarships to Bangladeshi students. Many students from this country are going to Russia to pursue higher degrees; they are becoming proficient in various subjects including nuclear science. Hopefully, the Russian government will increase this opportunity in the future. It is also investing in various sectors including electricity and fuel; The Russian government has said it will increase further support in the future. I think we also need to exchange our arts and crafts which are very important tools to represent cultural heritage of both the countries.

Both Bangladesh and Russia share the same ideals in various regional and international forums, including the

United Nations, in maintaining global peace and security. Both the governments take the existing bilateral relations to a unique height.

Finally I want to share one of my childhood nostalgia related to the Soviet Union: Just after the war of liberation we had a severe crises of food, clothing, footwear, milk for babies, oil. That time many relief goods came from Soviet Union, Poland and some other socialist countries. I saw many footwear, bicycle, clothing's, milk, biscuits came from Soviet Union and I was dreaming to have one for me. Finally with the help of our elder brothers I got one pair of high hill sued leather shoe which came from Soviet Union as relief. I still cherish that happy memory.

Bangladesh is celebrating its 50th birth anniversary as well as celebrating 100th birth anniversary of greatest hero Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In these greatest occasions we are also celebrating 50th years friendship between Bangladesh and Russia; I hope our friendship will be stronger in the coming days.

Shah Abdus Salam is a Founder and CEO, Development Wheel and DEW Crafts, Bangladesh.



Ghorashal Power Plant



Siddirganj Power Plant

Russia – Bangladesh Friendship: 50 Years of Glory and Love

Advocate Hasan Tarique Chowdhury



On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Russia, I am getting emotional while writing about the friendship between the two countries. All that comes to my mind is the space victory by Russian astronauts, the victory of the Russian working class and

the unforgettable history of the victory of the Russian athletes in the Olympics.

Probably the common people of this region have come to know Russia in a new way through the 'Letter from Russia' written by Rabindranath Tagore, a symbol of the consciousness and spirit of the people of Bangladesh. From Tagore's writing Bangla speaking people realized, how Russian nation engaged in the pursuit of excellence in education, knowledge and science through an extraordinary and historic revolution,. Rabindranath Tagore presented to the people of Bangladesh the immortal knot of the great people of Russia and the leader of their revolution, great V.I. Lenin. Tagore's outstanding literary work has raised the acquaintance and friendship of the Russian people with Bangladesh and the Bengali speaking people to a great height. As a result, the engagement between the people and government of Russia and Bangladesh has increased a lot. Also with the people of India and Nepal as well. That friendship of Bangladesh with the people and government of Russia is a rare example of international relations and mutual cooperation.

Bangladesh's friendship with Russia is a unique event in the history of international relations and mutual cooperation for various reasons. The biggest reason in this case is the birth of Bangladesh. The freedom fighters of Bangladesh under the able leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman defeated the Pakistani occupying army in a bloody

guerrilla war in 1971. As a result, Bangladesh gained independence. On the map of the world, a state called Bangladesh was born with red and green color flags. Among the states of the world which extended their hand of sincere cooperation in our great liberation war, the name of the then Socialist Soviet Union and Russia was foremost. At the time, Russia used veto power in the UN Security Council, forcing Pakistan's allies the United States and China to back down. This outstanding role of Russia had a very positive effect on India, another important ally of Bangladesh's liberation war. Russia's policy of solidarity in the liberation struggle of the oppressed nations of the world was in line with responsible diplomatic policy and in the true sense of the humanity. The birth of independent Bangladesh is a perfect example of that policy. The contribution of the Russian people and government in the liberation war of Bangladesh was not limited to diplomatic activities. Russia's contribution to the military training, armaments, logistics and economy of the liberation war is also outstanding. The people of Bangladesh at all levels are eternally grateful to Russia for that friendship. Russia's contribution to the history of Bangladesh's war of independence is written in gold letters. This friendship of Russia for the people of Bangladesh is not only for the period of liberation war. On the contrary, Russia's role in building and rebuilding the economic infrastructure of war-torn Bangladesh even after independence is wide and great. Everyone knows that the Pakistani military planted mines in the port of Chittagong to damage Bangladesh's foreign trade, knowing the sure defeat. The Russian navy took part in the post war minesweeping at the port of Chittagong. At the risk of life, a Russian navy removed Pakistani landmines and served for Bangladesh. Apart from giving life to the allied forces of neighboring India in our war of liberation, this self-sacrifice of the Russian forces is a great example of Russia's historical friendship with Bangladesh.



From the birth of Bangladesh till today, the level of historical friendship between Russia and Bangladesh has gradually increased. Thousands of Russian students have received undergraduate and postgraduate studies in various subjects in Russia and the then Soviet Republic on scholarships from the Russian government. Educated in various disciplines including medicine, engineering, agriculture, law, economics, sociology, those professionals of Bangladesh today are making a huge contribution to the formation and development of the country. Many Bangladeshi men and women have formed a strong social bond between the two countries by falling in love and marriage with Russian men and women. This has led to a great deal of social and cultural exchange between the people of Russia and Bangladesh. It is an invaluable asset to the friendship between the two countries. Various evil forces at home and abroad have conspired to damage this traditional and historical friendship between the two countries. But their attempt was not successful. In addition, the level of Russia's friendship with Bangladesh has been further strengthened. Today, Russia is a huge development partner of Bangladesh.

The potential of bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Russia is very high. Presently, Bangladesh's bilateral trade with Russia is more than 2 billion. In Russian market, there is a huge demand for Bangladeshi readymade gar-

ments, jute products, seafood, potatoes, and medicines. On the other hand, Russian wheat and fertilizer are very lucrative items in Bangladeshi market. Since Russia has age old economic and trade ties with Bangladesh, because of some unwanted difficulties trade between the two countries did not grow adequately. It is strong desire from common people of Bangladesh that economic and trade ties between this two countries will further strengthened in the coming days. It is a matter of happiness that Russia's Ambassador to Bangladesh H.E. Alexander V. Mantitsky is very active in this regard and his effort to increase bilateral trade is appreciable.

2022 marks the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh-Russia diplomatic relations. This moment is especially significant in many respects. In particular, to further glorify the extraordinary friendship between the two countries, the 50 years of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Russia should be celebrated in glamorous style. So that the new generation of Bangladesh can recognize our enemies and allies of the liberation war and know the exact history of the liberation war. In this great moment, I extend my best wishes and love to the people of Russia and their government.

Advocate Hasan Tarique Chowdhury is lawyers at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and a foreign policy analyst.

**Bangladeshi performers
in Moscow, September 2015.**



Bangladesh-Russia to jack up growth led activities

Md Mazdul Hoque



There is a proverb - a friend in need is a friend indeed. The Soviet Union played a significant role during Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971. After emerging as an independent nation, Bangladesh did not receive recognition from any powerful nation except the Soviet Union that recognized the war-ravaged and

newly independent Bangladesh on 25 January, 1972. Since then, diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Russia began to flourish at a fast pace.

It is pertinent and worthy to mention that bilateral relations between the two nations had actually started to move towards a positive direction in multiple ways since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The existing close cooperation on a wider range of issues - military, economic, political, and cultural- is truly impressive. The financial support to the tune of billion dollars received from the Russian Federation for some mega projects in Bangladesh is a testament of the warm bilateral relations. In the last couple of years, a dozen agreements have been signed centering mega projects ranging from Rooppur nuclear power plant to trade and investment. The projects under signed deal are expected to end soon. Bangladesh also signed for one billion arms deal with Russia. Inflow of foreign direct investment on the country's power sector is also significant. It is important to note that the Rooppur nuclear power plant got financial support worth US\$ 12 billion from Russia. As Bangladesh is an energy-dependent economy, there is no alternative to woo Russia's financial support.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation, visited Moscow in March 1972. Following his footprint, the two countries began to move forward bilaterally. During the short visit, Bangabandhu had formal talks with His Excellency Leonid I. Brezhnev, Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of USSR. At that time, an inter-governmental agreement on

economic and technical cooperation, trade representation, cultural, education and scientific cooperation was signed which laid the very foundation of the bilateral relations between the two countries. It is therefore to the full credit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that the relations have evolved from that initial friendly position to the present-day strong and multifaceted bilateral relations.

Though there are reasons to cherish the bilateral engagements in many areas between the two friendly nations. There have unfortunately been minimal developments in terms of expansion of relations based on trade and commerce. Bangladesh is a trade deficit country. If Russia decides to import Bangladesh made products for her population, Bangladesh's high trade gap is likely to shrink considerably. It is an undeniable and harsh reality that the two nations could not leverage the trade potential between them. Bilateral trade volume between two countries is far from satisfactory, though the trade volume is slightly on the rise in recent years. During the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic situation, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$665.31 million to Russian markets and imported goods worth \$466 million in the 2020-21 fiscal year. Bangladesh mainly exports apparel items, jute, frozen foods, tea, leather, home textiles and ceramic products to Russia. But there is a huge scope for export of sea foods, potato and pharmaceutical products in Russian markets. The country's imports from Russia include cereals, minerals, chemical products, plastic products, metal, machinery and mechanical equipment. Russia can export capital machineries, fresh and dried fruits and raw sugar. At present, Bangladesh's bilateral trade with Russia is more than two billion dollars. The two countries are now holding high-level talks to increase trade.

For effectively addressing LDC graduation challenges, Bangladesh needs foreign direct investment in the years to come. Bangladesh welcomes Russia, the world's largest country, for bringing capital to do business in Bangladesh. Bangladesh offers generous opportunities for investment



under its liberalized Industrial Policy and export-oriented and private sector-led growth strategy. FDI inflow from Russia is not praiseworthy. In view of FDI inflow, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently laid emphasis on expanding fields of cooperation with Moscow. Bangladesh is keen to welcome Russian investment in Jute.

Bangladesh and the Russian Federation always share a vision for a comprehensive, secure, and sustainable future. The cooperation has always been inclusive and has been thriving in a wide range of spheres from politics to culture. There are possibilities to unlock potentials and to widen trade activity between the two nations with a total population of over 300-million. It is possible to achieve greater prosperity and socio-economic development if the two countries work in concert with each other. The running head of the government of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina shortly after assuming office in 2009 planned to deepen existing relations with the Russian Federation in a mutually beneficial manner. Afterwards, at the invitation of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Russia in 2013. Sheikh Hasina was able to develop the relations through signing bilateral instruments on different sectors during her visit. The construction of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, cooperation in Law and Parliamentary affairs, edu-

cation, culture, agriculture, trade, power, energy and mineral resources has been brought under signed agreements. Moreover, Bangladesh and Russia signed a Protocol in 2017 for an Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) to review the existing level of cooperation, to identify potential sectors and broaden the scope of future cooperation in prospective sectors including trade and investment, science and technology, education and research, agriculture, power and energy, food, ICT and manpower recruitment.

It is good to note that Russia, in the meantime, passed a green signal to resolve the long pending Rohingya issue. If Russia helps Bangladesh in respect of Rohingya repatriation, it will be another milestone in their bilateral relations. Truly speaking, Bangladesh has been working hard to be engaged with Russia in many ways. As part of the move, a Currency Swap agreement was signed between Bangladesh and Russia that will help expedite trading in the days to come. If a special economic zone can be confirmed for Russian investors, Bangladesh will assuredly be benefitted from the inflow of Russian capital. I expect in the end that Bangladesh-Russia relations grow from strength to strength, putting the two nations on an eternal developmental trajectory.

The Writer is an economic affairs analyst and columnist.



Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. A.K. Abdul Momen, MP and the Russian Federation Foreign Minister Mr. Sergey Lavrov.

রাশিয়ান ফেডারেশন ও বাংলাদেশের বন্ধুত্বপূর্ণ কূটনৈতিক সম্পর্কের পঞ্চাশ বছর

মো. জিলুর রহমান



রাশিয়া বাংলাদেশের ঘনিষ্ঠ বন্ধুরাষ্ট্রে। বাংলাদেশের মহান মুক্তিযুদ্ধের সময় রাশিয়া বাংলাদেশের পক্ষে জোড়ালো ভূমিকা রেখেছিল। এজন্য বাংলাদেশ রাশিয়ার প্রতি আজীবন কৃতজ্ঞ। বাংলাদেশ সৃষ্টির সময় থেকে রাশিয়া এদেশের অকৃত্রিম বন্ধু। ১৯৭১ সালে তৎকালীন সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের আন্তর্জাতিক অঙ্গনে সহায়তা না পেলে

বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতা অর্জন কষ্টকর হতো। বর্তমানে বাংলাদেশ-রাশিয়া সম্পর্ক বলতে মূলত গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ এবং রুশ ফেডারেশনের মধ্যে দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্ককে বোঝায়। ১৯৭২ সালের ২৪ জানুয়ারি সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন বাংলাদেশকে স্বীকৃতি প্রদান করে এবং ২৫ জানুয়ারি রাষ্ট্রদ্বয়ের মধ্যে আনুষ্ঠানিকভাবে কূটনৈতিক সম্পর্ক স্থাপিত হয়। তৎকালীন সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের পতনের পর তার উত্তরসূরি রাষ্ট্র রাশিয়ান ফেডারেশনের সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশের দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্ক চালু রয়েছে। বাংলাদেশ ও রাশিয়ার বন্ধুত্বপূর্ণ সম্পর্ক দুই দেশের রাজনীতি, অর্থনীতি, বাণিজ্য, প্রতিরক্ষা ও সাংস্কৃতিক উন্নয়নে অবদান রাখছে।

বাংলাদেশের মুক্তিযুদ্ধে আন্তর্জাতিক পর্যায়ে ভারত প্রত্যক্ষভাবে সহযোগিতা করলেও পরোক্ষভাবে সর্বাত্মক ভূমিকা রেখেছিল তৎকালীন সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন। মিত্র দেশগুলোকে সঙ্গে নিয়ে এ রাষ্ট্রটি বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতার স্বপক্ষে জাতিসংঘের নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে জোরালো পদক্ষেপ নেয়। এ রাষ্ট্রের অনমনীয়তার কারণেই পাকিস্তানের পক্ষে একাত্তরের ডিসেম্বরে বঙ্গোপসাগর অভিমুখে সপ্তম নৌবহর পাঠিয়েও তা ফিরিয়ে নিতে বাধ্য হয় যুক্তরাষ্ট্র। মুক্তিযুদ্ধে অস্ত্র দিয়ে সহযোগিতার পাশাপাশি স্বাধীনতা-উত্তর সময়ে চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর থেকে মাইন ও ধ্বংসাবশেষ অপসারণেও দৃষ্টান্তমূলক ভূমিকা রেখেছে এ দেশটি। যদিও নব্বইয়ের দশকে এ রাষ্ট্রটি ভেঙে ১৫টি নতুন দেশ হয়েছে।

ইতিহাস থেকে জানা যায়, ১৯৪৭ সালে পাকিস্তান রাষ্ট্র প্রতিষ্ঠা লাভের পর প্রথমদিকে পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের সম্পর্ক ভালো ছিল না। কিন্তু পশ্চিম পাকিস্তানের সঙ্গে সোভিয়েতদের সম্পর্ক ভালো না হলেও পূর্ব পাকিস্তানের (বর্তমান

বাংলাদেশ) সঙ্গে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের ঘনিষ্ঠ সম্পর্ক ছিল। পাকিস্তান ন্যাশনাল আওয়ামী পার্টি (ন্যাপ) মোজাফফর এবং পাকিস্তান কমিউনিস্ট পার্টির সঙ্গে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের ঘনিষ্ঠ সম্পর্ক ছিল এবং পশ্চিম পাকিস্তানের তুলনায় পূর্ব পাকিস্তানেই দল দুটির জনসমর্থন বেশি ছিল। পূর্ব পাকিস্তানে গণতান্ত্রিক আন্দোলন এবং মার্কিনবিরোধী মনোভাব পশ্চিম পাকিস্তানের তুলনায় জোরদার ছিল, যা পরোক্ষভাবে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নকে সুযোগ করে দেয়। ১৯৫৪ সালে পাকিস্তান মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের সঙ্গে একটি সামরিক চুক্তি স্বাক্ষর করলে পূর্ব পাকিস্তানে এর বিরুদ্ধে তীব্র প্রতিক্রিয়া দেখা দেয়। এই চুক্তির বিপক্ষে পূর্ব পাকিস্তানে ব্যাপক বিক্ষোভ দেখা দেয় এবং পূর্ব পাকিস্তানের প্রাদেশিক পরিষদের ১৬২ জন নবনির্বাচিত সদস্য মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের সঙ্গে পাকিস্তানের সামরিক চুক্তির নিন্দা জানিয়ে যৌথ বিবৃতি প্রদান করেন।

আমরা অনেকেই হয়তো জানি, সে সময়ে বিশ্ব প্রধানত দুই শিবিরে বিভক্ত ছিল। এক শিবিরের নেতৃত্ব দিত মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র, অপর শিবির নিয়ন্ত্রণ করত সমাজতান্ত্রিক সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন সে সময় নীতিগত কারণে বিভিন্ন দেশের মুক্তিসংগ্রামে প্রত্যক্ষ ও পরোক্ষভাবে সহায়তা দিয়ে যেত। বাংলাদেশের ক্ষেত্রেও তার ব্যতিক্রম ঘটেনি। ২৫ মার্চ গণহত্যার প্রেক্ষাপটে সোভিয়েত প্রেসিডেন্ট নিকোলাই পদগোর্নি পাকিস্তানের প্রেসিডেন্ট ইয়াহিয়া খানের কাছে প্রেরিত এক বার্তায় পূর্ব পাকিস্তানে ব্যাপক প্রাণহানি, নিপীড়ন এবং বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিব ও অন্যান্য রাজনৈতিক নেতার গ্রেপ্তারের ঘটনায় উদ্বেগ প্রকাশ করেন। দমন-পীড়ন বন্ধ করে একটি শান্তিপূর্ণ রাজনৈতিক সমাধানের উপায় উদ্ভাবনের জন্য তিনি ইয়াহিয়ার প্রতি আহ্বান জানান। শীর্ষ দুই দেশের একটির তরফ থেকে এমন বার্তা মুক্তিযুদ্ধে প্রাণ সঞ্চয় করে।

পাকিস্তানের সামরিক জাভা ইয়াহিয়া খানের কাছে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের প্রেসিডেন্ট নিকোলাই পদগোরনির চিঠি পাঠানোর পরপরই ৬ এপ্রিল মার্কিন নীতি নিয়ে ঢাকার মার্কিন কনসুলেট থেকে আর্চার কে ব্লাড ও তার অধস্তন ২০ সহকর্মীর পক্ষ থেকে যুক্তরাষ্ট্রে প্রতিবাদপত্র পাঠানো হয়, যা হোয়াইট হাউসকে চরমভাবে বিরত করে। ব্লাড লিখেছিলেন, সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন যেখানে গণতন্ত্র



সুরক্ষা ও রক্তপাত বন্ধের আবেদন করেছে, সেখানেও পাকিস্তানের অভ্যন্তরীণ বিষয়ের অজুহাতে যুক্তরাষ্ট্র নৈতিক প্রতিবাদ জানাতেও ব্যর্থ হয়েছে।

কেবল বার্তা প্রেরণ নয়, সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের আরো জোরালো সমর্থন ও সহায়তা প্রত্যাশিত হয়ে উঠছিল ভারত-বাংলাদেশ উভয় দেশের জন্য। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের আরও বেশি সমর্থন আদায়ের জন্য তখন দুই দেশই বেশ সচেষ্ট হয়। সৈয়দ নজরুল ইসলাম ও তাজউদ্দীন আহমদের নেতৃত্বে প্রবাসী মুজিবনগর সরকার কলকাতায় সোভিয়েত প্রতিনিধির সঙ্গে আলাপ-আলোচনা করে আবদুস সামাদ আজাদকে বিশেষ দূত নিয়োগ করে মস্কো পাঠায়। মস্কোপস্থি ন্যাপ ও কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি তাদের মতো করে সোভিয়েত সমর্থন আদায়ের চেষ্টা নেয়। ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টিও এ বিষয়ে সম্পৃক্ত হয় এবং সহযোগিতার হাত বাড়িয়ে দেয়।

অবস্থা দৃষ্টে ভারত ধরেই নিয়েছিল, সমস্যার দ্রুত সমাধান চাইলে মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের সঙ্গে ভারতকেও যুদ্ধে জড়াতে হবে। মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের সক্ষমতা ও দেশের ভেতর তীব্র জনমত বিবেচনায় ভারত সরকার জয়ের ব্যাপারে সন্দেহমুক্ত ছিল। ১৯৭১ সালের ৯ আগস্ট দিল্লিতে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন ও ভারতের মধ্যে ২০ বছর মেয়াদি একটি সামরিক চুক্তি স্বাক্ষরিত হয়। এ চুক্তি অনুসারে ভারত পাকিস্তানের মধ্যে কোনো কারণে যুদ্ধ দেখা দিলে যুক্তরাষ্ট্র পাকিস্তানের পক্ষে অবস্থান নিলে সোভিয়েতও ভারতের সহায়তায় এগিয়ে আসবে। এই চুক্তিটিই মূলত যুক্তরাষ্ট্র, পাকিস্তান ও তাদের মিত্রদের মধ্যে উদ্বেগ উৎকর্ষা সৃষ্টি করে। এই চুক্তির মাধ্যমে ভারত আসলে তাদের যুদ্ধ প্রস্তুতির প্রাথমিক প্রস্তুতি সম্পন্ন করে এবং চুক্তিটির তাৎপর্য এত গভীর ছিল যে, পরবর্তী সময়ে হেনরি কিসিঞ্জার একে ‘বোম্বসেল’ বলে আক্ষয়িত করেছিলেন। প্রধানমন্ত্রী তাজউদ্দীন আহমদ প্রবাসী সরকারের পক্ষ থেকে ভারত-সোভিয়েত মৈত্রী চুক্তিকে স্বাগত জানান এবং দুই দেশের তরফ থেকে আরো বেশি সহায়তা কামনা করেন।

চুক্তি সম্পাদনের পরের মাস সেপ্টেম্বরে ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী ইন্দিরা গান্ধী সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন সফর করেন। তিনি দেশের সর্বোচ্চ ক্ষমতাস্বত্ব ব্যক্তি কমিউনিস্ট পার্টির সাধারণ সম্পাদক এল আই বোজনেভ এবং প্রেসিডেন্ট এন ভি পদগোর্নি ও প্রধানমন্ত্রী এ এন কোসিগিনের সঙ্গে দীর্ঘ বৈঠক করেন। বৈঠক শেষে যে যুক্ত ইশতেহারটি প্রকাশিত হয় সেটি বাংলাদেশের অভ্যুদয়ের ইতিহাসে

গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। এতে বলা হয়, শান্তি রক্ষার প্রয়োজনে উদ্ভূত সমস্যার রাজনৈতিক সমাধান ও শরণার্থীদের নিরাপদে দেশে ফেরার স্বার্থে জরুরি ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ প্রয়োজন। সেই জরুরি ব্যবস্থা প্রকৃতপক্ষে ভারতকে পাকিস্তানের বিরুদ্ধে যুদ্ধে লিপ্ত হওয়ার ছাড়পত্র। মুক্তিযুদ্ধে সোভিয়েতের নিরঙ্কুশ সমর্থন প্রদানের স্পষ্ট ইঙ্গিত। মৈত্রী চুক্তি ও যুক্ত ইশতেহারের পর ভারত বাংলাদেশের প্রতি সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের সমর্থন আরো খোলামেলা হয়ে উঠে। ভারতের সঙ্গে দ্বিপক্ষীয় বৈঠকের প্রস্তাব দিয়ে আসছিল পাকিস্তান। ভারত সুকৌশলে তাতে অসম্মতি জানিয়ে বলে, তারা কোনো পক্ষ নয় যে আলোচনায় বসবে কারণ এটা পাকিস্তান ও বাংলাদেশের অভ্যন্তরীণ সমস্যা। ভারত জানায় বাংলাদেশের জনগণ ও তাদের নির্বাচিত প্রতিনিধিদের কাছে গ্রহণযোগ্য কোনো রাজনৈতিক মীমাংসার মধ্যে প্রকৃত সমাধান নিহিত রয়েছে এবং ভারত আগাগোড়া এই যুক্তিতে অটল থাকে। জাতিসংঘ সাধারণ পরিষদের সেপ্টেম্বর-অক্টোবরের বহুল আলোচিত অধিবেশনে ভারতের পররাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী সরদার শরণ সিং একই যুক্তির পুনরাবৃত্তি করেন। সেই যুক্তির সঙ্গে সুর মেলান অধিবেশনে উপস্থিত সোভিয়েত প্রতিনিধি দলের নেতা সে দেশের পররাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী এ এ গ্রোমিকো। পরে সোভিয়েত প্রেসিডেন্ট পদগোর্নি দিল্লি সফরে এসে অভিন্ন যুক্তি প্রদর্শন করেন। ৩ ডিসেম্বর ভারত-বাংলাদেশের যৌথ বাহিনী ও পাকিস্তান সেনা-বাহিনীর মধ্যকার সর্বাঙ্গিক যুদ্ধ শুরু হয়ে গেলে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন অসাধারণ ভূমিকা পালন করে। পাকিস্তানের পরাজয়ের সম্ভাবনা আঁচ করতে পেরে পরদিন ৪ ডিসেম্বর মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র জাতিসংঘ নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে যুদ্ধবিরতির প্রস্তাব আনে। ‘একতরফা’ আখ্যায়িত করে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন সে প্রস্তাবে ‘ভেটো’ দেয়। পরের দিন নিরাপত্তা পরিষদের অপর আটটি দেশ মার্কিন প্রস্তাবের অনুরূপ প্রস্তাব পেশ করলে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন দ্বিতীয়বারের মতো তাতেও ‘ভেটো’ প্রয়োগ করে। নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে দুই-দুইবার সোভিয়েত ‘ভেটো’র সম্মুখীন হয়ে পাকিস্তান-আমেরিকা জাতিসংঘ সাধারণ পরিষদে যুদ্ধবিরতি ও সৈন্য প্রত্যাহারের প্রস্তাব আনে। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নসহ কয়েকটি দেশের বিরোধিতা সত্ত্বেও সাধারণ পরিষদে ওই প্রস্তাব পাস হয়ে যায়। প্রস্তাব উপেক্ষা করে ভারত-বাংলাদেশের যৌথ বাহিনী যুদ্ধ অব্যাহত রাখে। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের নিরঙ্কুশ সমর্থন এক্ষেত্রে বড় সহায়ক ছিল। যুদ্ধ চলাকালে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন বাঙালি মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের ব্যাপক



সামরিক ও আর্থিক সহায়তা এবং সামগ্রিকভাবে নৈতিক সমর্থন প্রদান করে। স্বাধীনতা যুদ্ধের শেষদিকে মুক্তিবাহিনী ও ভারতীয় মিত্রবাহিনীর নিকট প্রায় পরাজিত পাকিস্তানকে সহায়তা করার জন্য মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র বঙ্গোপসাগরে মার্কিন সপ্তম নৌবহরকে প্রেরণ করে। এর প্রত্যুত্তরে মুক্তিবাহিনী ও ভারতীয় বাহিনীর প্রতি সম্ভাব্য মার্কিন হুমকি প্রতিহত করার জন্য সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন ১৯৭১ সালের ৬ ডিসেম্বর এবং ১৩ ডিসেম্বর ভ্লাডিভোস্কক থেকে সোভিয়েত প্রশান্ত মহাসাগরীয় নৌবহরের দুই স্কোয়াড্রন ক্রুজার ও ডেস্ট্রয়ার এবং পারমাণবিক অস্ত্রে সজ্জিত একটি পারমাণবিক ডুবোজাহাজ প্রেরণ করে। সোভিয়েত নৌবহরটির নেতৃত্বে ছিলেন অ্যাডমিরাল ভ্লাদিমির ক্রুগিয়াকভ। সোভিয়েত নৌবহরের আগমনের ফলে মার্কিন নৌবহর পাকিস্তানকে সহায়তা করতে ব্যর্থ হয়। সোভিয়েত নৌবহর ১৯৭১ সালের ১৮ ডিসেম্বর থেকে ১৯৭২ সালের ৭ জানুয়ারি পর্যন্ত ভারত মহাসাগরে মার্কিন নৌবহরকে তাড়া করে বেড়ায়। এছাড়া সোভিয়েত নৌবাহিনী গোপনে ভারতীয় নৌবাহিনীকে সহায়তা করে এবং পাকিস্তান নৌবাহিনীর বিরুদ্ধে গুপ্ত অভিযান পরিচালনা করে। এদিকে সপ্তাহখানেকের ভেতর পাকিস্তানের পরাজয় নিশ্চিত হয়ে গেলে দুই নৌবহর বঙ্গোপসাগরে মুখোমুখি সংঘর্ষে জড়ানোর আগেই চীন আকস্মিকভাবে ঘোষণা দেয়, তারা পাকিস্তানের পক্ষ হয়ে সরাসরি যুদ্ধে জড়াবে না। চীনের এই ঘোষণায় স্তম্ভিত আমেরিকা সপ্তম নৌবহরকে নিশ্চল করে ফেলে। এরপর ১৩ ডিসেম্বর আমেরিকার উদ্যোগে নিরাপত্তা পরিষদে আবার যুদ্ধ বিরতির প্রস্তাব উঠলে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন ঠাণ্ডা মাথায় তৃতীয়বারের মতো তাতেও 'ভেটো' দেয়। অতঃপর পাকিস্তান সেনাবাহিনীর আত্মসমর্পণ ছাড়া উপায় থাকে না এবং বাংলাদেশ নামক স্বাধীন রাষ্ট্রের জন্ম হয়। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন মুক্তিযুদ্ধের শেষ দিনগুলোতে বাংলাদেশের বিষয়ে জাতিসংঘের যুদ্ধবিরতির প্রস্তাবে তিনবার ভেটো না দিলে ইতিহাসের গতিস্রোত অন্যরকম হতো। তা হলে হয়ত আমাদেরও ভিয়েতনামের মতো দীর্ঘস্থায়ী যুদ্ধ করতে হতো। এ কারণে মুক্তিযুদ্ধের সময় সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন যে ভূমিকা রেখেছে, তা বাঙালি জাতির ইতিহাসে স্বর্ণাক্ষরে লেখা থাকবে। মার্কিন সপ্তম নৌবহরকেও সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের রাশান ৬ নম্বর ফ্লিট ভারত মহাসাগর পর্যন্ত তাড়া করেছিল। এতে কোনো সংশয় নেই, সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের দৃঢ় অবস্থান ছাড়া নয় মাসে বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতা অর্জন কঠিন হয়ে পড়ত।

বাংলাদেশ স্বাধীন হওয়ার পরবর্তী বছরগুলোতে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশের বিশেষ সৌহার্দ্যপূর্ণ সম্পর্ক বিদ্যমান ছিল। মুক্তিযুদ্ধের সময় চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর ও কর্ণফুলি নদীতে পাকিস্তানি বাহিনী অসংখ্য মাইন পুঁতে রেখেছিল। তাছাড়া যুদ্ধের সময় অনেক নৌযান ডুবে যাওয়ায় বাংলাদেশের অর্থনীতির প্রাণকেন্দ্র হিসেবে পরিচিত এ বন্দরটি ব্যবহারের অনুপযোগী হয়ে উঠেছিল। যুদ্ধের পর সোভিয়েত নৌবাহিনী যুদ্ধবিধ্বস্ত চট্টগ্রাম সমুদ্রবন্দর থেকে মাইন অপসারণ এবং বন্দরটির কার্যক্ষমতা পুনরুদ্ধারের কাজে নিয়োজিত হয়। সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন প্রশান্ত মহাসাগরীয় নৌবহরের ২২টি জাহাজ এ উদ্দেশ্যে ১৯৭২ সালের মে মাসে দূর প্রাচ্যের ভ্লাদিভোস্কক বন্দর থেকে চট্টগ্রামে আসে। মাইন অপসারণের কাজটি সম্পন্ন করতে তাদের প্রায় এক বছর সময় লাগে এবং ইউরি রেদকিন নামক একজন সোভিয়েত মেরিন এসময় মাইন বিস্ফোরণে প্রাণ হারান। বাংলাদেশ নেভাল একাডেমি প্রাপ্তি তার কবর অবস্থিত।

সোভিয়েত সহযোগিতার ফলেই চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর খুব দ্রুত একটি প্রধান বন্দর হিসেবে পূর্বের অবস্থান ফিরে আসে এবং ১৯৭৩ সালে এর ধারণক্ষমতা যুদ্ধপূর্ব ধারণক্ষমতাকে ছাড়িয়ে যায়। এছাড়া, সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন নবপ্রতিষ্ঠিত বাংলাদেশ বিমানবাহিনীকে ব্যাপক সহায়তা প্রদান করে। বিশেষত সোভিয়েত সরকার বাংলাদেশ বিমানবাহিনীকে ১০টি এক-আসনবিশিষ্ট মিগ-২১ এমএফ এবং ২টি দুই-আসনবিশিষ্ট মিগ-২১ ইউএম যুদ্ধবিমান উপহার প্রদান করে। ১৯৭২ সালের মার্চে বাংলাদেশের তৎকালীন প্রধানমন্ত্রী বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমান প্রথম মস্কো সফর করেন এবং মুক্তিযুদ্ধের সময় সহায়তার জন্য সোভিয়েত সরকারকে ধন্যবাদ ও বিশেষ কৃতজ্ঞতা জ্ঞাপন করেন।

বাংলাদেশে ১৯৭৫ সালের সামরিক অভ্যুত্থানের মাধ্যমে বঙ্গবন্ধুর হত্যাকাণ্ডের পর সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশের সম্পর্কের দ্রুত অবনতি ঘটতে থাকে। পরবর্তী সরকারগুলো মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র, পাকিস্তান, মধ্যপ্রাচ্যের দেশগুলোর সঙ্গে ঘনিষ্ঠ সম্পর্ক গড়ে তোলে, ফলে স্বাভাবিকভাবে এসব রাষ্ট্রের প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশের সম্পর্ক শীতল হয়ে পড়ে। এসময় বাংলাদেশ সক্রিয় সোভিয়েত বিরোধী পররাষ্ট্রনীতি অবলম্বন করে। ১৯৭৭ সালে বাংলাদেশ কম্পিউয়ায় ভিয়েতনামের আক্রমণে সোভিয়েত সমর্থনের নিন্দা জানায় এবং ১৯৭৯ সালে সোভিয়েত



ইউনিয়ন কর্তৃক আফগানিস্তানে সামরিক হস্তক্ষেপের তীব্র বিরোধিতা করে। আফগানিস্তানে সোভিয়েত হস্তক্ষেপের প্রতিবাদে বাংলাদেশসহ আরো ৬৪টি রাষ্ট্র ১৯৮০ সালে মস্কোয় অনুষ্ঠিত গ্রীষ্মকালীন অলিম্পিক গেমস বয়কট করে। এছাড়া, ১৯৮৩ সালের ডিসেম্বরে এবং ১৯৮৪ সালের জানুয়ারিতে বাংলাদেশ সরকার ঢাকা থেকে নয় জন সোভিয়েত কূটনীতিককে বহিষ্কার করে।

তবে এসব সত্ত্বেও সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন বাংলাদেশকে বিভিন্ন সময় নানাক্ষেত্রে সহায়তা প্রদান করতে থাকে। রাশিয়া বিদ্যুৎ উৎপাদন, প্রাকৃতিক গ্যাস ও জ্বালানি তেলু এই তিনটি ক্ষেত্রের উন্নয়নে বাংলাদেশকে বিশেষভাবে সহযোগিতা করে। সোভিয়েত অর্থায়নে বাংলাদেশের বৃহত্তম তাপবিদ্যুৎ কেন্দ্র ঘোড়াশাল তাপবিদ্যুৎ কেন্দ্র নির্মিত হয়। ১৯৮৯ সালে বাংলাদেশে দাতা দেশগুলোর মধ্যে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের অবস্থান ছিল ১৪তম। এছাড়া, তখন সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়ন বাংলাদেশের সঙ্গে সক্রিয় সাংস্কৃতিক সম্পর্ক বজায় রাখে।

১৯৯১ সালে সোভিয়েত ইউনিয়নের পতনের পর বাংলাদেশ রাশিয়ান ফেডারেশনকে এর উত্তরসূরি হিসেবে স্বীকৃতি প্রদান করে এবং কূটনৈতিক সম্পর্ক অব্যাহত রাখে। ১৯৯০-এর দশকে রাশিয়ার সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশের সম্পর্ক ছিল খুব ভাল ছিল না। বসনীয় যুদ্ধ এবং অন্যান্য আন্তর্জাতিক ঘটনাবলিতে এসময় বাংলাদেশ ও রাশিয়া ভিন্ন পক্ষ অবলম্বন করে। পরবর্তীতে ২০০০-এর দশকে রাশিয়ার সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশের সম্পর্কের উন্নতি ঘটে।

২০০৯ সালে বাংলাদেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা সেন্ট পিটার্সবার্গ সফর করেন এবং তৎকালীন রুশ প্রধানমন্ত্রী ভ্লাদিমির পুতিনের সঙ্গে সাক্ষাৎ করেন। ২০১৩ সালের জানুয়ারিতে শেখ হাসিনা আবার মস্কোতে রুশ প্রেসিডেন্ট পুতিনের সঙ্গে সাক্ষাৎ করেন। ২০১৪ সালের ক্রিমিয়া সঙ্কটের সময় বাংলাদেশ মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্র ও অন্যান্য পশ্চিমা রাষ্ট্রের মতো রাশিয়ার বিরোধিতা না করে নিরপেক্ষতা অবলম্বন করে।

রাশিয়া বাংলাদেশ প্রতিরক্ষা বাহিনীকে অস্ত্রশস্ত্র ও সামরিক সরঞ্জাম সরবরাহকারী রাষ্ট্রসমূহের মধ্যে অন্যতম। এজন্য রাশিয়ার সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশ ১০০ কোটি ডলারের একটি সমরাস্ত্র ক্রয়ের চুক্তি করেছে এবং এর আওতায় সেনাবাহিনীর জন্য ট্যাঙ্কবিধ্বংসী মিসাইল ও সাঁজোয়া যান, বিমান বাহিনীর জন্য প্রশিক্ষণ জঙ্গি বিমান, পণ্যবাহী হেলিকপ্টার সহ নানা অস্ত্রসম্ভার সংগ্রহ করেছে। ২০১৩ সালে বাংলাদেশ রাশিয়ার কাছে থেকে মেতিস-এম ট্যাঙ্ক-বিধ্বংসী

ক্ষেপণাস্ত্র সংগ্রহ করে। ২০১৫ ও ২০১৬ সালে বাংলাদেশ রাশিয়ার নিকট হতে ১৬টি ইয়াক-১৩০ প্রশিক্ষণ বিমান ক্রয় করে এবং ২০১৬ সালে বাংলাদেশ রাশিয়া থেকে ৬টি এমআই-১৭১ এসএইচ হেলিকপ্টার ক্রয় করে। এছাড়া, বাংলাদেশ রাশিয়ার কাছ থেকে কেনা বিটিআর-৮০ সাঁজোয়া যান জাতিসংঘের অধীনে শান্তিরক্ষার কাজে ব্যবহার করছে।

রাশিয়ার সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশের বাণিজ্য বৃদ্ধির প্রচুর সুযোগ রয়েছে। ব্যাংকিং চ্যানেলে লেনদেন এবং কিছু শুল্ক জটিলতার কারণে রাশিয়ার সঙ্গে কাঙ্ক্ষিত মাত্রায় বাণিজ্য বৃদ্ধি করা যাচ্ছে না। রাশিয়ার বাজারে বাংলাদেশের তৈরিপোশাকসহ বিভিন্ন পণ্যের বিপুল চাহিদা রয়েছে। বিভিন্ন জটিলতার কারণে বাংলাদেশ বাধ্য হয়ে অন্য দেশের মাধ্যমে রাশিয়ার বাজারে বাংলাদেশের তৈরিপোশাক সহ অন্যান্য পণ্য রপ্তানি করছে। উভয় দেশের ব্যবসায়িক স্বার্থে এসব সমস্যা দ্বিপাক্ষিক আলোচনা ও কূটনীতির মাধ্যমে সমাধা করা জরুরি। গত ২০২০-২০২১ অর্থবছরে বাংলাদেশ ৬৬৫.৩১ মিলিয়ন মার্কিন ডলার মূল্যের পণ্য রাশিয়ায় রপ্তানি করেছে এবং একই সময়ে আমদানি করেছে ৪৬৬.৭০ মিলিয়ন মার্কিন ডলার মূল্যের পণ্য।

২০১২ সালে বাংলাদেশে পারমাণবিক বিদ্যুৎ শক্তির উন্নয়নে সহায়তা করার জন্য রাশিয়া ও বাংলাদেশের মধ্যে একটি সমঝোতা স্মারক স্বাক্ষরিত হয়। ২০১৩ সালে রাশিয়া বাংলাদেশের পাবনা জেলার রূপপুরে ২,৪০০ মেগাওয়াট ক্ষমতাসম্পন্ন একটি পারমাণবিক বিদ্যুৎকেন্দ্র নির্মাণের জন্য প্রতিশ্রুতিবদ্ধ হয়। এই প্রকল্পের মোট ব্যয় ধরা হয়েছে ১২ দশমিক ৬৫ বিলিয়ন ডলার, যার ৯০ শতাংশ দেবে রাশিয়া সরকার। ২০১৬ সালে বিদ্যুৎকেন্দ্রটির নির্মাণকাজ শুরু হয় এবং ২০২৪ সালের মধ্যে বিদ্যুৎকেন্দ্রটির দুইটি ইউনিট সম্পূর্ণ হবে বলে আশা করা যায়।

বাংলাদেশের প্রথম এই পারমাণবিক বিদ্যুৎ কেন্দ্র নির্মাণ কাজ এগিয়ে নিচ্ছে রুশ প্রতিষ্ঠান এএসই গ্রুপ অব কোম্পানি। বিদ্যুৎ কেন্দ্রের প্রথম পর্যায়ের কাজ ইতোমধ্যে অনেক দূর এগিয়েছে। প্রথম পর্যায়ের কাজ শেষেই শুরু হবে মূল কেন্দ্র নির্মাণের কাজ। এই পারমাণবিক বিদ্যুৎ কেন্দ্রে দুটি ভিভিইআর পাওয়ার ইউনিট থাকবে। যার প্রত্যেকটির বিদ্যুৎ উৎপাদন ক্ষমতা ১২০০ মেগাওয়াট। এর মধ্যে প্রথম ইউনিটটি উৎপাদনে যাওয়ার কথা ২০২২ সালে এবং দ্বিতীয় ইউনিটটি ২০২৩ সালে উৎপাদনে যাওয়ার কথা।

অন্যদিকে, বাংলার সঙ্গে রাশিয়ার সাংস্কৃতিক যোগসূত্র স্থাপিত হয় অষ্টাদশ শতাব্দীতে। প্রথম বাংলা নাটক মঞ্চস্থ করেছিলেন রুশ নাট্যকার ও অভিনাত্রী গেরাসিম লেবেদেভ। লেবেদেভ তার ভাষা-শিক্ষক গোলকনাথ দাশের সহায়তায় ১৭৮৫ সালের ২৭ নভেম্বর 'দ্য ডিসগাইজ' নামক একটি ইংরেজি নাটক বাংলায় অনুবাদ করেও ছদ্মবেশ নামে মঞ্চস্থ করেন। স্থানীয় বুদ্ধিজীবীদের সহায়তায় লেবেদেভ বাংলায় প্রথম ইউরোপীয় খাঁচের থিয়েটারও স্থাপন করেন। এছাড়া, লেবেদেভ একটি ছোট বাংলা অভিধান রচনা করেন, পাটিগণিতের ওপর বাংলায় একটি বই লিখেন এবং আনন্দমঙ্গল কাব্যের অংশবিশেষ রুশ ভাষায় অনুবাদ করেন। রাশিয়ার অনেক শিল্পী সাহিত্যিক বুদ্ধিজীবী আমাদের স্বাধীনতা যুদ্ধের সময় আন্তর্জাতিক জনমত তৈরিতে ব্যাপক ভূমিকা পালন করেছিলেন। অন্যদিকে এক সময়ে সোভিয়েত রাশিয়ার রাজধানী মস্কো থেকে প্রগতি প্রকাশনীর অনেক বাংলা বই প্রকাশিত হত এবং সেগুলো বাংলা ভাষাভাষীদের কাছে বেশ জনপ্রিয় ছিল।

রাশিয়া সরকার বাংলাদেশের শিক্ষার্থীদের বৃত্তি দিচ্ছে। এ দেশের অনেক শিক্ষার্থী রাশিয়ায় গিয়ে পরমাণু বিদ্যাসহ বিভিন্ন বিষয়ে

উচ্চতর ডিগ্রি নিচ্ছে এবং ভবিষ্যতে রাশিয়া সরকার এ সুযোগ আরও বাড়াবে। এছাড়া বিদ্যুৎ, জ্বালানিসহ বিভিন্ন খাতে বিনিয়োগ করছে; ভবিষ্যতে আরও বাড়াবে বলে রাশিয়া সরকার থেকে বলা হয়েছে।

১৯৭১ সালে স্বাধীনতা লাভের পর থেকে আন্তর্জাতিক পরিমন্ডলে বাংলাদেশের বৈদেশিক বা পররাষ্ট্রনীতির মূল ভিত্তি হলোও সকলের সাথে বন্ধুত্ব, কারও সাথে বৈরিতা নশ্ব, এই নীতি অনুসরণ করে বৈদেশিক সম্পর্ক বজায় রেখে চলেছে। একটি অসাম্প্রদায়িক রাষ্ট্র হিসেবে বাংলাদেশ সবসময়ই বিংশ শতাব্দীর স্নায়ুযুদ্ধে প্রভাবশালী রাষ্ট্রসমূহের পক্ষাবলম্বন থেকে বিরত থেকেছে। একটি মুসলিম সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ রাষ্ট্র হওয়ার কারণে অন্যান্য মুসলিম দেশগুলোর বাংলাদেশের সঙ্গে সুদৃঢ় কূটনৈতিক ও বাণিজ্যিক সুসম্পর্ক রয়েছে। ২০২২ সালের ২৫ জানুয়ারি বাংলাদেশ ও রাশিয়ান ফেডারেশনের মধ্যের কূটনৈতিক সম্পর্কের পঞ্চাশ বছর পূর্তি পালন করা হবে এবং এটা হবে একটি ঐতিহাসিক মুহূর্ত। ঐতিহাসিক কারণে এবং বাস্তবতার নিরিখে বন্ধুপ্রতিম দুটি দেশের সৌহার্দপূর্ণ ও দৃঢ় সম্পর্ক ভবিষ্যতেও অব্যাহত থাকবে বলে আশা করা যায়।

Md. Zillur Rahman is a banker and columnist based in Dhaka.



Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin.

In Pictures: Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina paid an official visit to the Russian Federation in January, 2013.



In Pictures: The Russian Navy's Post War Minesweeping Activities at the Chattogram Port



In Pictures: Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, Ishwardi, Pabna, Bangladesh.



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