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# RELIGION, POLITICS, AND NATIONAL SECURITY: UNDERSTANDING BANGLADESH'S IDENTITY DYNAMICS

Md. Abdullah Al Zobair[1]

**ABSTRACT**
Islam which is the religion of the majority people of Bangladesh, situated in the heart of Hindu-dominated India, has a great role in forming the national identity building despite the bitter experience of Pakistan rule in the name of Islam. Since national identity is the single most factor which acts intrinsically and extrinsically for protecting a nation from diverse threats, Bangladesh from the birth has been swinging between two contesting ideologies secularism and Islam till to date. With the change of power game, emphasis on redefining the national identity or its tendency has played a vital role in understanding the national security threats and respond to the threats. This study explored the relationship between Islam, national identity and national security of Bangladesh. Analyzing the historical events, the study found the prime ingredient of the national identity of Bangladesh is Islam and language. The study investigates two regimes BNP-Jamaat rule 2001-2006 and the Awami League-led secular forces rule 2014-2018 to understand the relationship between the ideology and national security. The study found Islam as a vital element for protecting national security and diffusing internal or external threats.

**KEYWORDS**
Political Islam, National Identity, Islam and Secularism, National Security, Bangladesh, Indian, Myanmar, South Asia

## INTRODUCTION

The issue religion, politics and security become intertwined in India subcontinent (Mohsin, 2004) before and after the partition of 1947 based on the two-nation theory that concurrently divided the greater Bengal into two uneven pieces that joined with Pakistan and India. The bloody birth of Bangladesh in 1971 after the nine-month-long war against the Pakistan misrule with all-out support from India has become radically different nation-state both politically and culturally. Surrounded by three sides by India, Bangladesh looked upon by many as "international basket case" and appeared destined to be a client state of India. These fears about Bangladesh's economy and sovereign existence seemed justified given the absence of any well-organized administrative political structure in the new state (Jahan, 2005). The fears

[1]Research Officer at National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Bangladesh. Email: azobair@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-9255-0995

over the long stay of Indian troops after independence was avoided by the strong intervene of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1972.

Being influenced by Indian politics, the new state had set for a secular start (Mohsin, 2004) but secularism did not reflect Bangladesh's societal spirit (Maniruzzaman, 1990) and the experiment was short-lived (Bhardwaj, 2009). After the 1975 political turmoil, Bangladesh reintroduces a new brand of nationalism that has "Islam at their core" (Bhardwaj, 2009) and distinct than ethno-lingual secular identity. In this five decades of independence, the identity of the nation swing between "Bengali" and "Bangladeshi" nationalism with the change of rulers' political inclination and accordingly showed response to security threats to Bangladesh.

While the primary purpose of any nation-state is to provide security within the geographically defined territory against both external and internal threats (Ripsman & Paul, 2010), the threat should be perceived considering the nation's geographical location, political ideology, economy, national power and many more. By security, we mean the protection and preservation of the minimum core values of any nation: political independence and territorial integrity (Maniruzzaman, 1982) since 'security rises and falls with the ability of a nation to deter an attack or to defeat it' (Wolfers, 1962). As a Muslim majority country without border with any other Muslim state, Bangladesh is consistently under the threat from neighbouring Hindu-dominated India and ultra-Buddhist Myanmar. Without the means of carrying out the extensive military activity (Batemen, 1979), neighbouring India appeared as the great security threat in the areas of border killing, internal political meddling, cultural aggression, market manipulation, bureaucratic and military demoralization, while Rohingya infiltration and exodus are a deadly security threat to Bangladesh (BIPSS, 2018; Haque, 2018; Idris, 2017; Rahman, 2010).

In examining the present factors which impinge on Bangladesh's national security we will adopt a state-level system approach. The study examines the general set of threats to political independence and border security from India and Myanmar during two regimes of Bangladesh Nationalists Party (BNP) and Bangladesh Awami League (AL), outputs of contesting ideologies Islam and Secularism (Hossain, 2015). The study is an endeavour to understand the influence of the regimes' identity shifting to deter national security threats.

**Literature Review and Rationale of the Study**

Batemen (1979) in "National Security and Nationalism in Bangladesh" showed the external challenges of national security where he explicitly indicated neighbouring India as the imminent source of danger for Bangladesh and found no threat to the political independence Bangladesh. Marking India's foreign policy expansionist, he had forecasted India's steady consolidation hegemonic position in South Asia. Bateman did not consider Rohingya refugee as a security threat for Bangladesh though Rohingya was a problem of his time.

Kabir (2000) compiled different traditional and non-tradition security strategies taken by the government in the years. In his studies, border killing, Rohingya infiltration and human trafficking come up as the security threat while he stressed for the alliance with great power for ensuring the balance of power, bilateral approach, regional and global cooperation for tightening national security of Bangladesh. He did not mention any relation between the regimes and security apparatus and threats.

Choudhury (2000) in his paper entitled "Conventional Security Threats to Bangladesh in the 21st Century: The Role of the Armed Forces" asserts that a look at the map of Bangladesh reveals that any invasion can originate either from India or Myanmar. He maintains that the defence strategy based on deterrence is militarily indecisive, economically unprofitable and politically unacceptable. He suggests for modernization of military for territorial security and cooperation among nations for combating terrorism, human and drug trafficking and regional political stability.

Husain (2000) in his paper "Political Instability in Bangladesh: Security Implications" considers two inter-linked issues political implications and its security

implications. The author draws an alarming conclusion in that political instability in Bangladesh if not redressed with a qualitative change in the political milieu, is likely to be a major source of multi-dimensional insecurity for the country in the days ahead.

Karim (2007) in his study examined the present national and international geopolitical scenario from historical perspectives of Bangladesh. He showed the national and international politics that also impinge on Bangladesh. He emphasized on the importance of soft power in managing the anarchical state of affairs of the world today.

Idris (2017) systematically approached the 2017 Rohingya influx and a potential threat to the security of Bangladesh in several dimensions. She mentioned that Rohingya refugees are vulnerable to recruitment by extremist/jihadist groups and potential to fuel militancy in the region.

Haque (2018) during the investigation of 2017 Rohingya influx to Bangladesh found to substantial impact on social and political degradation at different levels in Bangladesh such as environmental degradation, militancy, social unrest, intra-state conflict and uneasiness in Bangladesh' relationship with Myanmar and India.

All the studies by Batemen (1979), Kabir (2000), Choudhury (2000), Husain (2000), Karim (2007), Idris (2017) and Haque (2018) showed several dimension of the security aspects of Bangladesh but gave no focus on India's influence to the internal politics and border killing. However, how the religious identity concentrated Bengali nationalism, in other words, Bangladeshi nationalism, has become a core element of national identity and thus a security vanguard are largely absent in their studies. This study will address to answer the link between the national identity, mainly Islam and Secular identities, with national security perspective by analyzing two contesting regimes.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, I would like to employ the content analysis of credible secondary sources and substantiated them with intensive qualitative interviews. The content analysis—a robust examination of relevant materials—includes credible journal articles, books, newspaper articles, and Internet documents. Content analysis is significant because there is an enormous body of literature dealing with Islam, politics, and national security in Bangladesh. To thoroughly understand the subject matters, I need to make a robust historical survey of this literature. I would arrange interviews with two individuals from different professional groups in Bangladesh.

### National Identity of Bangladesh: Islam Vs Secularism battleground

Identity may be an essential component of a nation, but it remains an essentially contested concept within political theory. Language, religion, culture, shared history, ethnicity or citizenship have each been variously upheld to provide the foundation that gives rise to the feeling of nationhood (Sen, 2006). Ethnically and linguistically Bengali speaking people have been stretched in Bangladesh, Indian West Bengal with significant populations in Arunachal Pradesh, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Meghalaya and Mizoram (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2016) except the global Bengali Diaspora. Bengal, particularly the low-lying districts in the east and South-east, comparing much of present-day Bangladesh, where Islam found most of its adherents, long remained largely insulated from the cultural influences of northern India (Ahmed, 2001). Since arriving in the region, plausibly as early as the eighth century (Z. Khan, 1985), Islam has played an integral role in establishing an agricultural civilization throughout the then frontier terrain of East Bengal (Eaton, 1993; Z. Khan, 1985). By the seventeenth century, Islam took a solid ground in Bangladesh largely through Arab traders, the Sufis, and saints; however, its nature and manifestation have not been the same throughout the ages. (Islam and Islam 2018).

During the colonial period, Islamic renaissance movements consolidated political Islam in Bengal and made profound impacts on the sociopolitical and cultural landscapes of the Bengal Muslim society." Despite their ethnic affinity, the Bengali Muslims were alienated

from the Bengali Hindu (N. Islam, 1981). This alienation resulted from a natural sentiment of resentment against the Hindu landlords who had exploited the Muslim peasants all through the British occupation of Bengal (Mukherjee, 1973). East Bengal Muslims had been aroused again and again in the name of Islam throughout the British colonial period (Hashmi, 1994) and the Bengali Muslims' support had been instrumental and decisive in the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

After the independence of Pakistan based on "two-nation theory", the language movement sparked a renaissance of Bengali culture and an emphasis on secular ideas as opposed to Islamic ideology. Bengali intellectuals began to reinterpret the history of the nationalist movement emphasizing its class nature rather than its religious foundations (N. Islam, 1981). In the 25 years under Pakistan, new heroes were made and old ones replaced, symbols and myths were created and then torn apart, and history was continually written and re-written in the search to imagine a nation in ways that overcame the underlying deep-rooted contradictions (Bhardwaj, 2009).

Though the notion of secularism was absent in the entire course of the Bengali nationalist movement, Bangladesh after the independence turned into a secular state without any minimum people consensus (Bhattacharya, 2017; Hasan, 2011; Hossain, 2015). The main objective of the nationalist movements during Pakistan era was to attain autonomy and political and economic parity or, in another word, "democracy" which eventually culminated in the war of liberation and the creation of Bangladesh. There was no reference to secularism before the birth of Bangladesh.

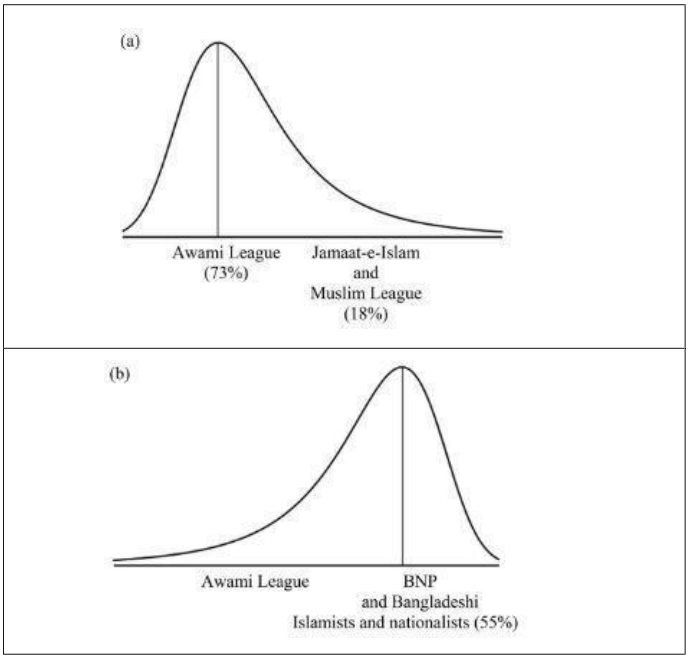
Secularism was imposed (Bhattacharya 2017; Islam & Islam 2018) from the above to de-Islamize the Muslims, collapse its morale and making its national identity a fluid. Religion as a principal source of Bengali Muslim identity retained its importance during the pre-Pakistan as well as post-Pakistan era at least for the masses (Islam, 1981) while Hossain (2015) said the 1971 independence war did not bring fundamental changes in the structural parameters of Bangladeshi Muslim society.

The constitution of 1972 placed secularism as a guiding principle of the state along with democracy, nationalism, and socialism (Jahan, 1973). The Mujib regime was, however, removed by a group of army officers followed by a series of coups and counter-coups between August and November 1975 (Maniruzzaman, 1976). Following the coups and countercoups, General Ziaur Rahman emerged as the de facto ruler in 1976. Zia removed secularism and emphasized Islamic ideology by amending the constitution (Ahamed, 1983). Zia was also assassinated in an abortive coup in May 198 (Khan, 1982). Justice Abdus Sattar succeeded Zia through a democratic election in November 1981. However, after a few months of Sattar's civilian rule, General H. M. Ershad, the then army chief, usurped power through a bloodless coup in March 1982. During his rule, Ershad incorporated Islam as the state religion in the constitution and made Islam as the guiding principle of his rule (Riaz, 2004).

In December 1990, Ershad's regime collapsed in the wake of strong and popular mass movements and Bangladesh entered a new phase of democratic/constitutional governance (Baxter, 1992). Since the re-emergence of democracy in the early 1990s, the country has been alternately governed by two main parties—Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of General Zia, and Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujib—with a brief hiatus of a military-backed caretaker government. Khaleda's regime (mainly two terms, one from 1991 to 1996, and the other from 2001 to 2006) demonstrated the pale imitation of Zia's policy and tactic of Islamization and frequent stress of Islamic symbolism (Shehabuddin, 2008).

The first term of Hasina's regime (1996–2001) demonstrated no inclination towards secularism and opposition to Islamization. However, the second term (2009–2014), in coalition with the leftist parties, witnessed a major shift in its governance style—from acceptance of Islamization towards the process of secularization. The regime restored

secularism as a state ideology, however, paradoxically retained Islamic phrase and provision




of state religion in the constitution. Driven by the ideology of secularism, the regime is reported to have been so desperate to "de-Islamize Bangladesh" that some scholars have marked it as the emergence of "ultra-secularism", "violent secularism", or "authoritarian secularism" (Islam, 2011).

The 'cultural divide' between the secularists and Islamists in Bangladesh was not an academic wrangle but an inheritance of the Muslim resistance to the Hindu cultural and political hegemony in undivided Bengal under the British (Absar, 2014). The dominant political narrative Secularism continues to polarize the Bangladeshis by and large (Islam & Islam, 2018). The proponents consciously divide the nation for larger political mileage by culturing these narratives at social, political, and intellectual levels against Political Islam. It is only natural to assume that since about 90 per cent of the population is Muslims, Islam will play an important role in moulding its politics and the socio-cultural norms and political culture of the bulk of the population (Hashmi, 1994) that constitute the national identity.

**Political polarization and the reemerge of Islam in Bangladesh**

After the fall of Ershad government in 1990, the Awami League and the BNP have both moved towards the political centre of the socialist–Islamist spectrum from their respective centre-left and centre-right positions. This reflects changes in the distribution of voters arranged by their preference for, on the one hand, ideology and, on the other, economic policy. Within a predominantly two-party political system, a unimodal distribution of voters can ensure political stability if the dominant parties follow rules and norms and cooperate in establishing democratic institutions with sufficient resilience to absorb and protect the societal consensus from random political and economic shocks. Consider the distribution of voters in 1970, 1991 and 1996, (Hossain, 2016) drawn three dimensions that lead an understanding that citizens of Bangladesh are polarized in the two contesting ideology-based political parties.

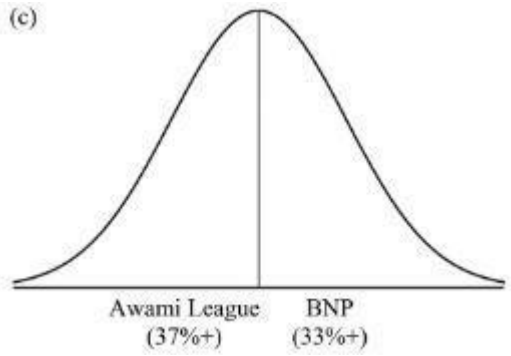



Figure 1: Convergence of political parties and voters in terms of economic policy and ideology. (a) Approximation of general-election voting distribution, Bangladesh, 1970. (b) Approximation of general-election voting distribution, Bangladesh, 1991. (c) Approximation of general-election voting distribution, Bangladesh, 1996. *(Hossain, 2016)*

**National Identity and National Security**

The concept of security has developed along two dimensions: sources of threat, and subjects of security/targets of threat. While the former would enlarge from politics, military, economy, environment, and to society, the latter would deepen from national, international, and to human. Alternatively, we may have a third dimension of security, that is, whether it is characters or relationships. In this fashion, security may contain both objective physical configurations and subjective mental conditions; while the former denotes being free from physical threats, the latter stands for feeling secure (Snow, 1998).

McSweeny (1999) similarly classifies the concept of security into positive and negative ones. The concern of security is how to mobilize physical resources to counter external threats, guarantee territorial integrity, and preserve domestic institutions. In other words, national security, at least in the short run, is tantamount to military defense. On the other hand, positive security is conceived as a relationship, which is a human construction as reflected in stable or changing collective identity. In this broad definition, insecurity is a threat to values or identity (Tickner, 1995). Accordingly, a long-term contemplation of national security has to take national identity into account.

Based on the tenets of neo-liberalism, Jepperson, Wendt, & Katzenstein (1996) argue that whether an event is considered as the threat is contingent upon the definition of national interests, which in turn would decide what constitutes proper security policy is and what adequate actions to take. While agreeing with Jepperson et al. (1996) that national security is decided by collective identity, particularly when members of the state fail to agree upon the contents of national identity, (Wendt, 1994) and (Campbell, 1998), taking a similar perception approach, would underline the importance of identity, rather than norms or culture. According to the tenets of realism, national identity is destined and fixed. Alternatively, proponents of constructivism would argue that national identity is formed after interactions, negotiations, learning, definitions, and construction, which is beyond the elites' control (Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1992).

**Security Threat and Response to the threats**

India and Bangladesh maintain an extensive and a wide range of relations covering several areas of mutual interest. Relations between Bangladesh and India are complex, sensitive and multidimensional in nature. There are enduring linguistic, cultural and religious similarities between the people of Bangladesh and India that transcend their respective national identities (Vinayaraj, 2009). Bangladesh's idea of security conforms to the observation by Barry Buzan (1991: 106) 'that domestic threats to a government can rarely be wholly separated from the influence of outside powers, and in this sense, the domestic security problems of weak states are often hopelessly entangled with their external relations'.

In the political stage, it is hard to distinguish the two largest political alliances BNP and Awami League as the orthodox followers of 'Bangladeshi' and 'Bangalee' nationalisms in terms of response to the security threats. Both the parties have program and agenda that overlap the two contesting ideologies: Islam and Secularism as Shikder (a prominent poet and professor of Bengali literature and secretary of Hundreds Citizens, a pro-nationalist citizens' platform) opined none are pure ideologues rather opportunists and bourgeois. Nevertheless, the chapter focuses the security threats border security, political interference, economic threats and ecological threats and the response of the BNP-Jamaat alliance government 2001-2006 and AL-leftist alliance government 2009-2014.

**a. Border Security**

The border disputes that caused strains in the relations between Bangladesh and India can be traced to the geophysical environment and the history of the two countries (Vinayaraj, 2009). While border security is the fundamental of physical security of a nation, the border along with India has emerged "as bloodiest international borders this past decade" (Walker, 2011) in the world with frequent Bangladeshi nationals' killing by Indian Border Security Force (BSF).

**BNP-Jamaat regime (2001-2006):** After the Independence, Bangladesh and India engaged in a war-like situation for the first time in 2001, when Indian Border Security Forces were intruded into Bangladesh. BBC reported on 18 April 2001 "at least 18 soldiers, 16 of Indian BSF and two were BDR jawans, have been killed in an exchange of fire between Indian and Bangladeshi border guards at a border outpost in Kurigram. India says Bangladeshi troops overran and occupied a disputed border village near the town of Dauki and are holding more than 20 of its soldiers hostage while Bangladesh said Indian forces launched an early morning attack on their posts in the frontier district of Kurigram." During the BNP-Jamaat rule in 2005, two Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel were killed in a border skirmish with Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), later renamed Border Guard Bangladesh or (BGB), along the Akhaura border in Sylhet. Meanwhile, 2011 The Guardian report stated that "India has almost finished building a 2,000km fence. It also said:

> *"Over the past 10 years, Indian security forces have killed almost 1,000 people, mostly Bangladeshis, turning the border area into a South Asian killing field. The killings were in cold blood against unarmed and defenseless local residents. Almost as shocking is the lack of interest in these killings by foreign governments who claim to be concerned with human rights. A single killing by US law enforcement along the Mexican border makes headlines. The killing of large numbers of villagers by Indian forces has been almost entirely ignored (Adams, 2011).*

Human rights defender Odhikar composed border killing and other forms of violations by BSF against Bangladeshi citizens in 2019.

Table-1: Human rights violations along the border by BSF against Bangladeshi citizens (2001-2006)

| Year | Killed | Injured | Abducted | Missing | Rape | Snatching /Looting | Push in | Others | Grand Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2001 | 84 | 29 | 55 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 179 |
| 2002 | 94 | 42 | 118 | 30 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 296 |
| 2003 | 27 | 41 | 120 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 205 |
| 2004 | 72 | 72 | 30 | 73 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 180 |
| 2005 | 88 | 53 | 78 | 14 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 240 |
| 2006 | 155 | 121 | 160 | 32 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 479 |
| (Odhikar, 2019) | | | | | | | | | |

Awami League regime (2009-2014): Human rights activists said the gruesome killing of 15-year-old girl Felani on January 7, 2011, had a significant role in pushing the two forces to enforce strict measures to reduce the number of border killings. Felani's killing was a brutal example of the aggression of the Indian Government towards Bangladesh over the past decades (Odhikar, 2018).

Table-2: Human rights violations along the border by BSF against Bangladeshi citizens (2009-2014)

| Year | Killed | Injured | Abducted | Missing | Rape | Snatching/ Looting | Push in | Others | Grand Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2009 | 98 | 77 | 25 | 13 | 1 | 1 | 90 | 3 | 308 |
| 2010 | 74 | 72 | 43 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 197 |
| 2011 | 31 | 62 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 125 |
| 2012 | 38 | 100 | 74 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 16 | 238 |
| 2013 | 29 | 79 | 127 | 0 | 1 | 77 | 41 | 0 | 354 |
| 2014 | 35 | 68 | 99 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 209 |
| (Odhikar, 2019) | | | | | | | | | |

Odhikar (2018) rightly observed that Bangladesh government's role should have been that of an independent sovereign state in terms of maintaining its border, territorial integrity, sovereignty and the security of its citizens. It is sad but true, that the Bangladesh government has forgone the interest of the country for the vested interest of the political party in power and adopted a weak foreign policy on matters relating to India. Taking advantage of this, the Indian government is pushing its wrongdoings on Bangladesh; and in the process, is acquiring their interests.

**Rohingya Issue**

After the 1962 military coup that brought Myanmar's military regime to power, the Rohingyas were systematically denied their civil, political, economic, and social human rights, culminating in the Burmese Citizenship Act of 1982. The Myanmar regimes' (the State Peace and Development Council [SPDC]) policy of extermination, ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Rohingyas forced the current generation of Rohingyas to flee their homes and seek protection in Bangladeshi' refugee camps. In the late 1970s, Naga-Min Operation led about 250,000 Rohingya to flee Myanmar and enter Bangladesh (Banglapedia, 2006). By the end of 1979, more than 180,000 Rohingya had been repatriated to Myanmar (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2006), but in 1991-92, when Pyi Thaya Operation led about 250,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh, that flow was reversed and the government of Bangladesh lost patience. The influx of such a large number of refugees posed serious problems for the government, which expressed serious concern to Myanmar (Rahman, 2010). UN mediation between Bangladesh and Myanmar, aimed at resolving the refugee problem, produced an agreement calling for "safe and voluntary" repatriation of refugees in early 1992. That agreement was signed by the foreign ministers of both countries and repatriation began in early September 1992. By 1999, about 200,000 Rohingyas had been repatriated, some were forced. According to Bangladesh, 1,100,000 Rohingyas are still awaiting repatriation. Forced displacement of the Rohingya Muslim minority from the Arakan (or Rakhine) of Myanmar posed a high-security concern for Bangladesh (Idris, 2017; Rahman, 2010). Rahman (2010), Haque (2018) and Idris (2017) composed the Rohingya security threats for Bangladesh are as follows:

I. Instability and violence in the Rakhine state, especially activities of terror groups with linkage with Rohingya group will pose a threat to Bangladesh border security (BIPSS, 2018).

II. The Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar have become fertile ground for recruitment by Islamic militants. The stateless Rohingyas are vulnerable and desperate, and likely become militant to uphold their interests.

III. Trafficking was already a problem in Cox's Bazar before the most recent influx of refugees from August 2017. With so many more people now at risk, it is vitally important to work together with the police and other and other authorities to prevent an increase in trafficking victims over the coming month.

IV. Rohingya are most vulnerable to be recruited by outlawed militant groups alluring them to fight for free Arakan.

V. The stateless men are a good target for transnational arms smugglers and by them, small arms could be a security concern for Bangladesh.

VI. Rohingya people have already become narcotics traffickers and carriers.

VII. Undocumented Rohingya refugees use Bangladesh passport to travel abroad and damage the labour market and reputation of Bangladeshi citizens. Bangladesh has already started to suffer from the practice.

VIII. Moreover, antisocial activities are increasing among the unregistered Rohingya refugee community. The social vices in the Rohingya community: commercial sexual

exploitation, fake marriages, fake proposals of work, and the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STI) threaten the local social life and damage the stability of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border region.

Following an agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar during 1991-1996 BNP regime hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people return to Myanmar and in 2003 only two of 20 refugee camps remained in Bangladesh.

When violence flared up in Rakhine in 2012, Bangladesh became host country for Rohingya people. Instead of taking a tough stance against the latest exodus, the AL government welcomed more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims considering humanitarian aspects but did not consider the security threat from them though the security threat is high.

**b. Internal Political Meddling**

As the 'India factor' has become an inseparable part of the psyche of the Bangladeshi political leadership, the leaders of Bangladesh fully expect India to 'meddle' in its internal affairs if it is seen as a threat to India's security (Chari, 1999). This threatens Bangladesh's political independence and sovereignty and constitutes a political threat to Bangladesh. Even though the Friendship Treaty was signed when relations between the two countries were cordial, later it was seen as yet another political threat. This is because the Friendship Treaty did not preclude the possibility of intervention by India itself, with a force of arms or otherwise (Kodikara, 1990). This is a critical issue during elections in Bangladesh and emerges as anti-Indian rhetoric during election campaigns. Due to the anti-India stance of BNP and Jamaat, India could not meddle internal affairs during the rule. Even, Khaleda Zia took "Look East Policy" to overcome the Indian hegemony in the region. Her government cold relationship with big neighbor deprived the country to reach any agreement over water treaty, enclave or reducing border killing.

Odhikar (2018) reported that the Indian government had played a significant role in destroying the democratic system in Bangladesh through direct interference and unconditional support to the controversial and farcical National Parliament Elections on January 5, 2014. As opposed to a democratically elected government, a government elected by unscrupulous means will kneel to the interest of India, for which such controversial election was supported by India. This farcical election has created immense political crises, and taking advantage of it the Indian government has established dominance in Bangladesh in various ways.

The ideological threat stems from India's concern over the growing Islamisation of Bangladeshi politics. Many Bangladeshi policymakers and analysts believe that India would prefer Bangladesh to become a secular state like India. India's repeated statements on this issue have only contributed to the perceived threat.

**c. Economic security threats**

The most serious problem that Bangladesh has faced since independence is that of a completely shattered economy. India extended help to promote Bangladesh's economic development. India intended to gain dominance over Bangladesh's economy; a fact that was evident in India's endeavour to obtain command over the industrial and market potentials of Bangladesh since the country's independence (Vinayaraj, 2009). Bangladesh, with a population of nearly 130 million people, is a big market for India (Aiyar, 1999). Even the proposed South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ) comprising of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and north-east India is viewed in Bangladesh as a part of a larger Indian design to dominate Bangladesh's economy. Some Bangladeshi analysts (Haider, 1997) fear that given India's huge economy, comparative advantage in industrial development and domination in bilateral regional trade, India's monopolisation of the proposed sub-regional bloc and flooding the markets of member countries with its goods will lead to the destruction of the industrial potential of Bangladesh. It is feared that if SAGQ is operationalised, India would easily be able to monopolise Bangladesh's market.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's trade deficit with India has aggravated over time. A limited export base, backward industries, inadequate infrastructure, lower productivity, appreciation of Bangladesh's taka against the Indian rupee, earlier and faster liberalisation programme in India, tariff and non-tariff barriers imposed by the Indian government, huge illegal trade, India's diversified exports and a technologically advanced industrial base, have all contributed to Bangladesh's huge trade deficit vis-à-vis India. This huge deficit contributes to Bangladesh's economic dimensions of the threat perception vis-à-vis India.

India has been guiding control Bangladesh to take steps rail and road transit to associate with its north-eastern states. Technically narrate, the issue of transit was determined in 1972 when both sides accepted on a mutually favourable layout for the use of their waterways, railways and roadways for commerce between two nations and for promotion of goods to places in one country by the locality of the other (S. R. Islam, Kabir, & Akter, 2018).

India has taken transit facility through Bangladesh at almost no cost and also decided to put up a fence along with no man's land, within 150 yards from the zero line along the border, violating international border law. India is also taking advantage of other business and trade facilities from Bangladesh. As a result, the Indian multinational companies are signing agreements with the Bangladesh Government, without any tender bids, to build various infrastructures (Odhikar, 2018).

**d. Ecological security threats**

The Indian government is depriving Bangladesh of getting adequate water during the dry season and thousands of people living along the banks of the Teesta River are in danger due to the refusal of water by India to Bangladesh, through the Gajaldoba Barrage. The Padma River basin in Bangladesh has also been ruined due to the Farakka Barrage in India. The Indian government is artificially flooding Bangladesh by opening all the sluice gates of the Farakka Barrage and the Gajaldoba Barrage, during the Monsoon (rainy) season, violating international law and human rights. Furthermore, a decision to implement an inter-river connection project is leading Bangladesh to terrible human disaster and environmental catastrophe.

**Concluding Remarks**

Indeed, Islam is so intimately tied to Bangladeshi society that current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia were obliged to cover their heads for public appearances (Haider, 2015). This paper has reviewed the tortuous and prolonged case of national identity formation and politics in Bangladesh. Majority of Bangladesh don't opt for theocratic state and Shariah law rather they seek Islam as a vital role in moulding culture, state affairs, and governance. Though Awami League is a pro-secular and left-leaning political party while BNP continuously maintains a relationship with largest Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami, both parties swap between secular and Islamic ideals. Like, Sheikh Hasina has demonstrated willingness to make common cause with religious radicals for political gain, signing an agreement with Khilafat Majlis—a group considered by some to be a pro-Taliban style Islamist group—as a strategy to win elections.

In quest of national identity, though state-sponsored and mechanized secular ideals secured equal stance in the battlefield with Islam. The above discussion strongly indicated that Islam is the vital element of national identity building, thus national integration against any external influence and threats. While domestic politics has always influenced the foreign policies of countries around the world, what is interesting in Bangladesh–India relations is the extent of influence that the Bangladeshi political leadership wields in shaping its foreign policy towards India. Instead of being an instrument for furthering national objectives, the foreign policy has become a device for enhancing sectional and group interests in domestic politics in Bangladesh. That is, during elections in Bangladesh, the India bogey is often raised to gain electoral points. Each party accuses the other of being pro-India. The fear of being labelled 'pro-India' has prevented many Bangladeshi leaders from taking positive steps

towards improving relations with India. The powerful Bangladeshi military has also had a role in cultivating the threat perception about India. The more India is perceived as a threat, the more important the military enjoys and the more money is allocated to defense. The real of fear for national security undeniably is India's hegemonic rule, internal political meddling due to welcoming nature by political parties basically by Awami League, all-pervasive policy to control the market, agriculture and production, though, would not merge Bangladesh with India but a virtual province. From the above discussion, we can reach a consensus that Islam and Islam-centric nationalism can some extent provides national security than the secular forces like a border against the cultural aggression and any illicit effort to disintegration. As Shikder concluded Islam is the guarantee of national security of Bangladesh from the very beginning of the nation traced the medieval period.

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