

We shouldn't forget our true friend Russia

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; Bangladesh'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 Ledge 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 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 1000 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 globe. 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 cooperation 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 Bangaboundhu'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 culture 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.

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