



Begum Khaleda Zia is a Bangladeshi politician who served as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh from 1991 to 1996, and again from 2001 to 2006/ Image: Daily Star

India since the liberation of Bangladesh has favoured Mujibur Rahman whose daughter is the current Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia leading the BNP has been favoured by the U.S. and the Pakistanis in the 1980's.

Bangladesh, a nation situated to the east of India sharing a land border of about 4100 km, is facing a crucial time which will have an impact on both these nations. This moment can be a historic turning point which can have some political and economic concerns not just between these two countries but also for their neighbours. India and Bangladesh are going to face elections in the same year and it will be a test of their foreign policy goals.

After 10 years of long stability between India and Bangladesh, the ties are facing fresh uncertainty due to the current unstable political situation in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League has been in power since 2009 and in the 2014 elections, Awami League won more than half of the seats unopposed by its arch-rival Begum Kalidasia's Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP) that had boycotted the elections. Now in 2019, when Bangladesh will face fresh elections the Bangladesh Awami League party, BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islamia along with the other minority parties will go through a decisive stage in forming the next government.

From time to time there has been protests, marches and demonstrations and the recent ongoing incident has triggered thousands of school children and university students to come out in the streets. In retaliation, the Bangladeshi authorities have shut down mobile internet services across the country and the clashes between the police and the protesters have continued for over two weeks due to this tragic demise of the two school children. This political instability has led India to keep a close watch on the political situation of their

neighbouring country where India had played a major role in its liberation in 1971.

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During the liberation of Bangladesh, the predecessor of current Jamaat-e-Islami party had strongly opposed the break off from Pakistan and later in the 1980's and 90's had aligned with the BNP led by Zia ur Rahman and then by Kalidasia. The main two parties the Awami League party and the BNP are in a stalemate situation due to the presence of big divisions in their ideologies. In March 2017 the former president Ershad of Jatiya party had formed a 58 party alliance and is planning to contest the forthcoming elections. With all these scenarios a very volatile situation has been created with each party having an edge over the situation and this has, in turn, disturbed the balance in the domestic as well as the regional affairs of the country.

The question that arises is that if there is a shift of power in the governance, then will it be favourable to India and how will the Indian foreign policy makers counterbalance this situation with its alliance partner, U.S.?

The apparel sector is the largest contributor to Bangladesh's economy employing around 3.6 million workers in 4500 factories and U.S. is the biggest buyer of Bangladeshi apparel which is worth over USD 5.2 billion annually. This sector is the highest revenue generating sector contributing to around 80% of Bangladesh's total exports. As the U.S. is one of the biggest trading partners of Bangladesh, it has an immense influence on the governance of Bangladesh. Unlike the 1980's the U.S. has switched its strategic partnership from Pakistan to India which has brought India and the U.S. on the same side which neutralizes the earlier fear of U.S. and Pakistan together.

With this scenario, India has political and economic advantages, as India and Bangladesh share the same land border and also Bengalis on both the sides possess cultural and historical commonalities. The bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh was about US\$ 7.52 billion in the year 2016-17 which is bound to increase in the coming years to improve the standard of living from lower income to a middle-income status. From all these facts one thing is clear that the challenging time is for the 160 million people living in Bangladesh who will decide the foreign policy, defence policy and the economic policies of their country for their own betterment.

The changing domestic political scenario of Bangladesh and its influence on India's Foreign Policy

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