

Tun Mahathir's administration of Malaysia's relationship with Bangladesh: A preliminary appraisal

La administración de Tun Mahathir en las relaciones de Malasia con Bangladesh: Una evaluación preliminar

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the pertinency and materiality of Malaysia's affiliation with Bangladesh. It presents the picture of deep reciprocal relationships in trading and investment, workforce issues, and the societal, religious and cultural exchange between Malaysia and Bangladesh that deserve elevated research to get ideas of a further snapshot. The historiographic approach and literature-based qualitative method apply to this research and uses written primary and secondary sources to gather information. Several published texts and archival documents examine to achieve the objective. In terms of significance, the result of this study would craft a narrative of a new spear of the economic relationships, societal circumstance, and cultural contact that especially evident during Tun Mahathir administration when he served Malaysia as the fourth Prime Minister that would deserve supplementary study. Furthermore, it would serve to understand the characteristics of the subsequent engagements of Malaysia with Bangladesh.

Keywords: Society; culture; economy; Malaysia; Bangladesh; Foreign Relations

RESUMEN

Este estudio examina la pertinencia y la materialidad de la afiliación de Malasia con Bangladesh. Presenta el panorama de las profundas relaciones recíprocas en materia de comercio e inversión, las cuestiones relativas a la mano de obra y el intercambio social, religioso y cultural entre Malasia y Bangladesh, que merecen una investigación elevada para obtener ideas de una instantánea posterior. El enfoque historiográfico y el método cualitativo basado en la literatura se aplican a esta investigación y utilizan fuentes primarias y secundarias escritas para recopilar información; varios textos publicados y documentos de archivo examinan para lograr el objetivo. En cuanto a su importancia, el resultado de este estudio permitiría elaborar una narrativa de un nuevo punto de vista sobre las relaciones económicas, las circunstancias sociales y el contacto cultural, especialmente evidentes durante el gobierno de Tun Mahathir, cuando ocupó el cargo de cuarto Primer Ministro de Malasia, que merecería un estudio complementario. Además, serviría para comprender las características de los posteriores compromisos de Malasia con Bangladesh.

Palabras clave: Sociedad; cultura; economía; Malasia; Bangladesh; relaciones Internacionales



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1. Introduction

Malaysia's relationship with Bangladesh is pertinent in the sphere of the South and Southeast Asian regional linkage. It was established in the remote past and got importance rather than the most discussed current question of diaspora, and that has created a spacious avenue of bilateral cooperation. In terms of late twentieth-century relationship status, many small and least developed countries (sometimes populated Muslim nations) came under the vision of Tun Mahathir Mohamad through his visionary foreign policy formulation during his Prime Ministership from 1981 to 2003. As an Asian nation, Bangladesh got the attention of the then Prime Minister of Malaysia that drew the aspects of the trade, investment, labour force issues, and societal cooperation. Along with many other reasons, Tun Mahathir Prime Ministership was significant because of the more extended period than any other era of Malaysian prime minister. This time, Mahathir threw his eyeshot to Bangladesh alongside the least developed Muslim populated nations on the globe in line with practising bilateralism and multilateralism in the foreign policy that did not get space in academic discourse, even though the socio-cultural and economic issues have been prioritized in the historical relationships of Malaysia and Bangladesh through the hereditary process. This time, both the nations established new relationships through many new engagements in professional assistance, labour migration, religious education, and the existing cultural and Tablighi missionary movements. From this viewpoint, examining the pertinency of the affiliation of Malaysia with Bangladesh is time expedient. Researching this subject matter would craft a new sphere of economic relations, societal circumstance, and cultural contact that was especially evident during Tun Mahathir administration when he served Malaysia as the fourth Prime Minister. Such a study would aid in understanding the characteristics of Malaysia's subsequent contacts and new engagements with this South Asian nation, Bangladesh.

The influx of demand for labour in Malaysia from Bangladesh, expanding trade and investment of Malaysia to Bangladesh, and the new sphere of socio-cultural movement tinted the bilateral relation between Malaysia and Bangladesh from 1981 to 2003. The avenue of the relationships has widened since Malaysia maintains a free, ethical and pragmatic foreign policy formulated based on the value of peace, humanity, justice and equality. It has engaged globally through bilateral and multilateral cooperation (Malaysia, 2020). Regarding Malaysia's foreign concern, the small Asian countries have acted as key players rather than western dynamics of power and ideas in building international relations (Milner & Kasim, 2018) during the late 20th century, and Bangladesh was one of that actors. This time, Malaysia had been considered a progressive Islamic nation, and such moderation has built trade and economic ties with the overseas nations that materialized because of Mahathir's boldness and innovative policy in line with multilateralism (Khalid, 2010).

Malaysia's foreign policy has considerably modified, and the concept of the east look policy adopted by the government expedited economic development. The foreign policy emphasized regional development cooperation and Islamic unity by cooperating with Organisation Islamic Conference (OIC). It was also directly involved in forming Group 15 (G15) and G-8, which helped accelerate progression in the least developed Muslim nations (Othman, 2013). Malaysia and Bangladesh tied by a historical relationship since the early days. Both the countries ruled by the British colonial administration and Malaysia became independent in 1957. Bangladesh was part of Pakistan and got independence in 1971. Since then, Malaysia has tied with Bangladesh through

economic and social cooperation. During the Tun Mahathir period, this relation became multifold and got the highest responsive position. Therefore, researching Tun Mahathir's eyesight towards Malaysia's relationship with Bangladesh would be a new and formal study that will provide an impression of reciprocity about the economic and socio-cultural phenomenon and a new avenue of the bilateral relationship of both Asian nations.

The recent approaches to the economic and social relations between Malaysia and Bangladesh are multi-layered. Trade investment, labour migration, and cultural exchange, the linkages in education and the new aspects of migrations, regional security and defence issues, and others widened the horizon of the existing relationships among these two nations. Interestingly, this relationship had a historical background that can be traced since the ancient period of the Malay Peninsula when the territory of present Malaysia known as 'Suvarnadipa' or the land of gold and the ancient Bengal was divided into several townships (Majumdar, 1971) with different names. There was a historical, socio-economic connection between these two regions and bilateral diplomatic relationships from the early period.

The Federation of Malaysia was a developing country like Bangladesh in terms of economic growth, and both states had similarities in religious practice in the 1980s (M. o. F. A. Malaysia, 1983). In the 1990s, this Southeast Asian nation was able to graduate itself at an advanced position with economic and technological progress through the visionary statesmanship of Tun Mahathir. On the eve of that journey, Malaysia felt that the developing countries like Bangladesh, who were also practising similar Islamic culture, could be cooperative in the process of the development of the country. From this point of view, Malaysia intended to build good relationships with Bangladesh alongside other countries. Bangladesh was also fortunate by getting Malaysia's extended hand as it was a new country and needed help from a country like Malaysia. In this way, both the nations wanted to explore further cooperation avenues by emphasizing education, culture, religion, human resources, agriculture, industries, trade, investment, technical cooperation, and joint ventures.

Moreover, Bangladesh had a wealth of workforce that helped develop the new projects implemented by the Tun Mahathir led Malaysia's government during the late decades of the 20th century. Through migrant labours, Bangladesh earned a considerable amount of remittance, contributing hugely to Bangladesh's growing economy. It was one of the most remarkable gains for Bangladesh that materialized because of both countries' friendly bilateral foreign policy. From this point of view, Malaysia and Bangladesh's socio-economic issues have been a leading academic discourse in Asian socio-political and diplomatic history. As a result, the societal and economic relations created through the statesmanship of Tun Mahathir Mohamed in the 1980s gradually got a multifaceted dimension concerning the aspects of trade investment, cultural exchange, and human resources. The socio-economic and bilateral diplomatic promptness appeared by the multiple visits of Tun Mahathir to Bangladesh within the tenure he served as fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1981 to 2003.

Most significantly, as the fruit of that relationship, multiple agreements, memorandum of understanding, protocol has been signed to create, maintain, and promote a consolidated bonding. Even after the ending of the regime of 1981 to 2003, the relationships of these two states

renewed by signing the further memorandum of understanding and other agreements on different aspects of common interest. For example, MoU on Anti Money Laundering signed by the central bank of both countries, Bank Negara Malaysian and Bangladesh Bank in 2012, on Bangladeshi workers recruitment on Government to Government basis of 2012 and the Memorandum of Understanding on Transnational Crime of 2012 galvanized the existing relations, and ensured the fair transaction of currency and human resources and decreased the inter-nations wrongdoings in the arena of the economic aspect. Agreements on the Partial Abolition of Visa Requirements, MoU on Cooperation in the field of Tourism and the previous MoU on the Employment of Workers of 2014 eased the legal and hassle-free movement of the Bangladeshi labours and the tourists of both countries. Besides, the Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural, Arts and Heritage Cooperation retained between two governments accelerated the bilateral cultural cooperation. Hence, the proposition statement is that the 1980s and 1990s were when a concrete plinth had created in respect of the socio-economic aspects within the framework of the friendly bilateral relationship between Malaysia and Bangladesh, which shaped a compatible platform of labour issues, trade and investment and societal relations.

Literature analysis shows a vacuum about the potential source that hinder taking the initiative to construct a narrative over Malaysia's relationships with Bangladesh. However, the critical evaluation of the existing one provides an idea of the storyline regarding the problems. It offers an overview of sources while researching a topic and displays how research fits within a widening field of study, and surveying books, articles, and other sources related to the research topic aid in understanding the gaps and scope related to a particular study. Unfortunately, over social, cultural and economic relations and the pattern and stance of diplomacy between Malaysia and Bangladesh, very few books and articles are available. With pondering acute crisis of sources as a limitation for carrying research on the present subject matter, the literature concerned Malaysia's foreign policy, foreign policy of Bangladesh, and bilateral relation between Malaysia and Bangladesh conceiving issues have been reviewed. Moreover, literature about the relationship between South Asia and Southeast Asia and Malaysia and Bangladesh analyses to understand the present subject matter.

Anthony S. K. Shome stated in the *'Malay Political Leadership'*, the author stated that the foreign policy of Tum Mahathir Mohamad was a kind of blend type of the policies with USA, Great Britain, Australia, and Singapore, that was not so warm or cool excessively but was much friendly with Asian and Middle Eastern countries (Shome, 2002). From this well-written book and the discussion over the relation of Malaysia with Asian countries, a sort of foreign policy approach about South Asia has been borrowed. Saravanamuttu described some diplomatic relations issues between Malaysia and various countries and regions in *'The Dilemma of Independence: Two Decades of Malaysia's Foreign Policy 1957-1977'* (Saravanamuttu, 1983). It also offers the historical background of the international relations on which modern Malaysia's foreign policy has stood up. Besides, the writer referred to bilateral diplomatic relationships with few specific and significant potent states and regions and some trade and investment issues in his scholarly text. However, this text is vague on diplomatic relations with South Asia as the geopolitical quarter. *'Malaysia's Foreign Policy, the First Fifty Years-Alignments, Neutralism, Islamism,'* is another book by Johan Saravanamuttu where the

author narrated the background of Malaysia's foreign policy development. It examined the Tun Mahathir era's bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations issues (1981-2003) (Saravanamuttu, 2010). The South Asian region did not get importance in his discussion.

'*Malaysia: Fifty Years of Diplomacy 1957-2007*', by Chandran Jeshurun, illustrated the foreign relations of Malaysia from the independence of the country to the early twenty-first century (Jeshurun, 2007). Few aspects of India and Pakistan's relation with Malaysia have got space in his work related to South Asian countries. However, thoughts and ideas could be loaned from the narration over India and Pakistan's relation. 'Tengku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia's Foreign Policy 1963-1970' of Dato Abdullah Ahmad exercised to express the aspects of Malaysia's foreign policy (Ahmad, 1985). A line history has illustrated that includes the country's political overview and provides the source of the idea of conceptualizing the country's foreign relation. 'A tribute Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad- The Foreign Policy of Dr. Mahathir between 1981 and 2003 that Put Malaysia on the Global Map' of Datuk Dr. Paddy Bowie comprised the significant activities of Tun Mahathir on the global level that mostly over the streamlining of Malaysia's foreign relation (Bowie, 2006). The author principally discussed the issues of the formation of various regional alliance and global organizations like G15, D-8, ASEAN and such. Hence, this book's pro is that researchers can get the overall ideas of Malaysia's newly initiated foreign policy matters. Karminder Singh Dhillon has written the book '*Malaysian Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Era 1981-2003-Dilemma of Development*' (Dhillon, 2009). This text is regarding Malaysia's foreign policy and diplomacy of Tun Mahathir's period, 1981-2003, and delivers a profound idea of foreign relation issues that helps get ideas related to this study. This scholarly book principally brought the domestic and international sources of the foreign policy and their consequences on Malaysia itself and beyond. In discussing the issues related to third countries, the global Islamic context of Bangladesh and Malaysia came together directly or indirectly from the related discussion. '*Reflection: The Mahathir Years*' of Bridget Welsh has included a range of issues of Tun Mahathir era of 1981 to 2003, like domestic politics, economic and socio-cultural aspects, and the foreign policy of Mahathir (Welsh, 2004). Sources used as references mainly were the primary sources that illustrated the country's accurate picture and politics and suggested the diverse points of Malaysia's foreign relations.

Juliet Pietsch and Marshall Clark edited a book entitled '*Migration and Integration in Europe, Southeast Asia, and Australia: A Comparative Perspective (Global Asia)*' (Pietsch & Clark, 2015). It contained a chapter entitled Malaysia Labour migration, irregular movements and regional policies that dealt with some bilateral issues on skilled and unskilled labours between Malaysia and Bangladesh. Likewise, the '*Mahathir Administration-Performance and Crisis in Governance*' of Ho Khai Leong and James Chin (Leong & Chin, 2001) is a collective of scholarly articles that discussed various pros and cons of Mahathir's administration of 1981-2003. It included an article on Malaysia's foreign policy during Mahathir's administration that has illuminated international relations issues but is not directly related to the subject matter of this research work.

Literature over the relationships of Bangladesh with Malaysia is also minimal. Books and articles comprised Bangladesh's foreign policy formulation issues could be consulted to get an idea about the country's foreign relations. S. R. Chakravarty edited the '*Foreign Policy of Bangladesh*' that contained the source of the early relation between Bangladesh and other countries, including

the superpowers like the USA, UK, USSR and China (Chakravarty, 1994). Most of the articles dealt with the bilateral relation of Bangladesh with India and Pakistan, considering the resourceful text about the foreign policy pattern of the newly emerged Bangladesh. It provides some vital and relevant information closely related to Malaysia and Bangladesh's bilateral relations. Virendra Narain, in his book *'Foreign Policy of Bangladesh (1971-1981)'* analyzed the significant issues of the background of the liberation war of Bangladesh (Narain, 1987). In this well-written book, the author also presented the context of the international political forces during and after Bangladesh's independence, those impacted hugely in formulating the foreign policy and bilateral relation with various countries. Though the narration of this book was limited from 1971 to 1981, it helped get the background information regarding Bangladesh's foreign policy.

'Pakistan and Malaysia: A comparative Study in National Integration' written by M. Nazrul Islam. The author has maintained the chronology of history in illuminating the foreign policy issues between Pakistan and Malaysia (Islam, 1989). This text helped provide little information subject matter regarding this study. However, it has revealed some background information on Malaysia and Bangladesh's foreign policy, which determines Malaysia's bilateral diplomatic and socio-economic issues that working with Bangladesh. Though the author included the discussion regarding Pakistan, Bangladesh was the integrated part of Pakistan from 1947 to 1971, and the issues were related to Bangladesh. *'Transformation of Rural Communities in Asia'* of Yoshimi Komoguchi provides a comparative narration on some particular regions of Bangladesh and Malaysia (Komoguchi, 2000). The author revealed diverse aspects regarding the agricultural pattern of Bangladesh. This text did not discuss bilateral diplomatic relations but the issues from the second half of the 20th century over agriculture and others.

In the book *'Foreign Labor in Malaysian Manufacturing-Bangladeshi Workers in the Textile Industry'*, Anja Rudnick discussed the issues, especially the textile industry in Penang, Malaysia (Rudnick, 1996). The author used the primary data in writing the book and directly relevant to the current study. As an excellent reference source, this text authenticates the discussion over the labour migration issues from 1981 to 2003. *'Development Issues, Policies and Actions: Selected Recent Works on Malaysia and Bangladesh'* of Rafiqul Islam Molla and others provide some data and information regarding few economic development aspects of Malaysia and Bangladesh. Some of the information was from the source from 1981-2003 when Tun Mahathir served as the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia (Molla et al., 2013). Mohammed Ayoob narrated a few issues related to Bangladesh about the period of liberation war of 1971 in his article entitled *'Southeast Asia in Indian Foreign Policy: Some Preliminary observations'* (Ayoob, 1987). The author presented the discussion of Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan and global multilateral aspects and the international diplomatic arena. However, the contents of this text enriched with many authentic primary sources and relevant. An immensely worthy and most relevant discussion composed in the dissertation written by Masud Rana (2013) entitled *"Malaysia-Bangladesh economic relation: 1971-2010"* (Rana, 2013). This thesis underpinned various aspects of economic interaction that materialized between Malaysia and Bangladesh. The author used some significant primary sources to grab the information related to the thesis's subject matter. However, societal and cultural issues did not include this thesis rather than stressing the economy-related subjects.

Therefore, the research gap in the discourse of economic and social relationships is still an issue arising question in the spear of researchers and the inquisitive mind of readers. Most of the scholarly write-up did not explore the complete set of socio-economic issues. Thus, the present study engages its effort to expose some valid new indications regarding two countries' reciprocal trading, human resource exchange, and socio-cultural that would be the way forward of further elevated study on this subject matter.

2. Methodology

As a research methodology, the historiographic approach and literature-based qualitative method apply for conducting this research. Written primary and secondary sources use through examining published and unpublished documents to achieve and fulfil the set objectives. The joint communique of Malaysia and Bangladesh examines as primary sources to get the ideas of the prior status of the relationship. Agreements and reports produced by several government wings over various aspects related to the subject matter of this study have been analyzed by consulting the potential libraries and archives.

As secondary sources, the published books, journal articles, newspapers and reports kept in archives have helped with providing relevant information. For example, the report and documents provided much exciting information like the parliament discussion, communique and speeches of the state premier and ministers over the issues related to the reciprocal relationships of Malaysia and Bangladesh. Likewise, information collected from several publications produced by different research organizations (IDFR, BISS) offered many data related to trade and investment. In addition, some Newspapers like The Strait Times and The Business Times also offered authentic information over the bilateral visits of the head of the states and governments and bilateral discussion and cooperation.

3. Results

3.1 Concept and Perspective

Relationships of Malaysia with Bangladesh have been prevailing with the collective mechanism of bilateralism and multilateralism and underlining trading and investment, labour issues, and socio-cultural exchange. Generally, more than two countries or parties in international relations are multilateralisms or multilateral relations (Fukushima, 1999). The multilateral or multi-sided involvement in the nation's discussion brings the best solution favoured by the United Nations and maintained by other international organizations. Here, the economic and social interactions can create historical diplomatic relationships among nations, whether bilateral or multilateral. In economic sociology and political economy, the economic and social aspects include few multidisciplinary programs concerning society and economy rather than a single identified social sciences study field (Hellmich, 2015). These ingredients of socio-economic arenas worked behind determining the relationship between Malaysia and Bangladesh.

Customarily, bilateral diplomacy is the diplomatic conversation between the states or heads of the states or the ambassadors. It focuses on the embassy or high commission-based discussions and agreements between the two countries and includes political and economic relations, cultural

exchanges, trade agreements, joint military exercise, etc. Paul Sharp study shows that diplomacy and diplomatic relationships shape the issues of international relations where the institutions and states represent themselves and play a critical role (Murray et al., 2011). In this connection, Malaysia's linkages with Bangladesh facilitate bilateral trade issues, investment and migrant labour issues, and the socio-cultural norms that occurred between both nations during the tenure of the ruling of Tun Mahathir Mohamad, 1981 to 2003.

In the academic discourse, questions may confer about the significance of the Malaysia-Bangladesh economic and social relations and Malaysia's trading and investment progression in Bangladesh and the approaches and characteristics of labour migration to Malaysia from Bangladesh and the bilateral socio-cultural activities. Following these interrogations, this study's objectives could be to examine the significance of Malaysia-Bangladesh economic and social relations in developing both nations and analyze Malaysia's trading and investment in Bangladesh. In addition, it might investigate the approaches and characteristics of labour migration to Malaysia from Bangladesh and the traits of bilateral socio-cultural activities based on Malaysia's attitude towards Bangladesh.

Regarding the scope of the study, the year 1981 is significant because of the commencement of Tun Mahathir Mohamad Prime Ministership in Malaysia when the relationship with Bangladesh positively got multifactual dimensions, especially got attention on some specific areas. For example, the issue of labour migration got formal and official recognition at that period. Subsequently, the warm relationships opened many new windows of many new fields like trade and investment, technological support, and cultural cooperation until the early of the new century. However, in 2003, the ruling of Tun Mahathir had ended, and bilateral relations issues became multifactual and got new attention. Hence, a study stressing this period might reveal a set of ideas that would help understand the features of that particular period and get an indication and way forward of the subsequent eras.

3.2 Malaysia's Contact with Bangladesh

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, Malaysia formally recognized Bangladesh on February 25 1972, as a sovereign nation. It established a bilateral relationship with Bangladesh in line with its foreign policy and made linkage through the promotion of regional cooperation. Being a member country of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), since 1970, Malaysia got new friends in the Muslim world. As an independent country and having a Muslim majority, Bangladesh got priority in Malaysia's foreign policy. Following such a positive attribute of Malaysia, in the early June of 1972, Bangladeshi delegates led by its Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad visited Malaysia for the first time. This time, Malaysia assured of sponsoring Bangladesh's admission into the United Nations and its other agencies. Over and above that, Malaysia promised Bangladesh to send two rubber experts to Bangladesh for expanding its rubber plantation project. Malaysia also extended its hand to help Bangladesh in the sector of Jute and Rice growing technology. Likewise, Bangladesh expressed its position about the Malaysian students were studying in Bangladesh (East Pakistan) and leaving the country due to the liberation war by the promise of allowing them to reenter Bangladesh to continue their studies (Chandola, 1972). As a new sovereign country, Bangladesh also urged Malaysia to appoint Malaysian High Commissioner in Dhaka. In this way, Bangladesh was able to win friends in the Southeast Asian region.

Malaysia established their High Commission in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, in November 1972 and later appointed its High Commissioner. As a result, the bilateral relationship between these two fraternal countries became formal and official. On the other hand, in April 1973, the first High Commissioner from Bangladesh presented his credentials to the King of Malaysia (M. o. F. A. Malaysia, 1973). Subsequently, the highest political, ministerial, and official level visits contributed enough to promote friendship, mutual understanding and cooperation. On October 24 1973, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Malaysia and called on with the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. (N. A. Malaysia, 1973). In this call, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman invited the Malaysian King to travel to Bangladesh, and His Majesty King Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah visited Bangladesh on December 3 1974 (Malaysia, 1974).

Malaysia built relationships with Bangladesh through penning several agreements and Memorandums of Understanding, and the early signed agreement between the two countries was the News Exchange Agreement in August 1975. They stamped the trade agreement on December 1 1977, and on April 12 1978, a foreign minister-level meeting was held in Dhaka, and both countries agreed to expand the bilateral cooperation. By signing a cultural cooperation agreement, they encouraged bilateral cooperation in education, science, literature, culture, and sports (Bangladesh, 1978). In April 1979, Bangladesh President visited Malaysia (Hasan, 1983), followed by an eleven-member Bangladesh trade mission to Malaysia in the same year, discussing the concerning issues with the Ministry of Trade and Industry members of Malaysia (Times, 1979). They also signed the Air Services Agreement in July 1978 to ease the airports using permission and frequency of flight operation from both sides. The Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement initialled in April 1979 in Kuala Lumpur (Press, 2020). This year was also remarkable for signing the Money Order Agreement over the foreign currency exchange.

3.3 Promptness of Tun Mahathir Administration

Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad paid three official visits to Bangladesh from 1981 to 2003, opening additional windows among these two countries' contact. During this era, a considerable number of agreements, protocols and memorandum of understanding were signed between two states to promote and build new relations in different areas that fundamentally elaborated bilateral issues of friendly relationship. Tun Mahathir opined that Malaysia and Bangladesh have many areas of cooperation like the recruitment of human resources, cultural exchanges, aviation and investment protection, trade and business development, and technical assistance (Malaysia, 1994). Accordingly, Malaysia looked to sign several bilateral agreements, memorandum of understanding (MoU) and protocols in this connection.

3.3.1 Eyeshot on Workers Migration

Transitional labour migration from Bangladesh to Malaysia through a formal stream was absent before 1992 (Roy, 2016). However, since 1984, Malaysia has negotiated with several countries, including Bangladesh, over the bilateral memorandum of understanding to streamline labour migration issues (Harkins, 2016). As a result, the diplomat level arrangement about labour migration from Bangladesh to Malaysia materialized in 1992 by penning the formal agreement,

though the first test basis migration happened in 1986 for the plantation project with 500 workers. Subsequently, in 1994 another agreement was signed over workforce transfer, and during the nineties, the average number of labour migrated from Bangladesh to Malaysia was around 50,000 annually (Ullah, 2016). Though, the Asian Financial Crisis negatively impacted that program that interrupted for several years (Abdul-Aziz, 2001).

However, Malaysia had a massive demand for workers for its various development projects. To fulfil that demand, Malaysia has officially started to import the workforce from Bangladesh (Sarker, 2016) and signed labour migration agreements with Bangladesh in 1992 that laid a strong foundation stone and created a longstanding bilateral relationship between the two nations (Khan et al., 2020). Under this agreement, from 1992 to 1994, around 130,000 people migrated to Malaysia as the labour force (BMET, 2020). To continue the labour migration flow, the second bilateral labour agreement signed in 1994 determined that Malaysia will import 50,000 labours every year for deploying in their construction sector (Khan et al., 2020). After penning this agreement, from 1995 to 1997, around 102,000 people entered Malaysia that practically did not meet the target previously set in terms of the number of persons imported by Malaysia. Unfortunately, because of the rising financial crises in Asia, the migration of the labour force to Malaysia decreased hugely, and around 100,000 people were deported in 1997, and the year 1999 was a complete vacuum. However, from 2000 to 2003, more than 20,000 workers entered Malaysia from Bangladesh, and a new memorandum of understanding was penned on the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers in 2003 (Colachal, 2008).

Therefore, being a populated Muslim country, Malaysia and Bangladesh were in a favourable situation in creating the warmest diplomatic tie. In the early 1980s, the advent of Tun Mahathir as the Prime Minister of Malaysia opened the windows for the countries of the Asian region and a state exercising Islamic culture. From this viewpoint, along with other Muslim countries, Bangladesh was also in the list of Malaysia's favourite countries, and the Bangladeshi labours got a kind of soft corner and permitted to enter Malaysia in mid-1980s. Though the relationship between these two states was in a good stance, in the early twenty-first century, the number of labour migration was not significant that started in the early 1990s. This picture was the reality because bilateral relations sometimes translated into frustration for Malaysia and Bangladesh due to the malpractice of the migration issues. For example, in 1997, Malaysia's Government has imposed a ban on the entry of Bangladeshi labours due to several irregularities done by the Bangladeshi labours in Malaysia (Roy, 2016).

There were some obligatory deeds determined by the international conventions and agreements signed by both nations in terms of labour migration. They needed to follow the guidelines and regulations of several international (IOM, ILO, etc.) and domestic institutions impacted the mutual diplomatic promptness, and the labour migration issues impacted immensely by those approaches whatever in positively or negatively. However, Bangladeshi labours are mostly less educated, unskilled and not aware of various laws and by-laws related to transitional migration, for which sometimes the workers violates the laws concerning payments and working and living environment (Siddiqui, 2006, p. 17). Nevertheless, from the 1990s to 2003, several agreements and memorandum of understanding were penned between Malaysia and Bangladesh to streamline

bilateral labour agreements. The matter of unsuccess of the bilateral diplomacy is that both parties are still in a failing position concerning over expenses of the migration cost and few irregularities in compensation, remuneration and remittance. Besides, the illegitimate labour migration still is an issue that keeps concerned the diplomates in both ends, Malaysia and Bangladesh. Both illegal migration and the high cost was also the burning problem from 1980 to 2003.

3.3.2 Trade and Investment Opportunity

Malaysia and Bangladesh consciously and systematically established cooperation on the trade and economic front and hoped to boost economic ties between the two Muslim nations (Times, 1993). In 1983, both countries signed two agreements on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Maritime Transport. In addition, the agreement on Information Cooperation and, Investment Promotion and Protection of 1994 offered an easy exchange of information and created a more suitable environment to invest in Bangladesh from Malaysia. In 1985, Bangladesh-Malaysia signed an agreement between the Malaysian automobile company Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional (Proton) and Bangladesh transport company the Multimode Transport Consultant to promote the Malaysian car Proton Saga (Malaysia, 1986).

In 1983, the Maritime Transport Agreement signed between Malaysia and Bangladesh helped widen the cooperation in sea-born transportation and freight carriage to excel the trade investment through export-import movability. In November 1985, agreements between Malaysian Investment and Trading Corporation (MITC) and the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) accelerated Malaysia and Bangladesh's trading and investment cooperation. Furthermore, Malaysia entered into Investment Guarantee Agreements (IGAs), aiming to promote a conducive environment for investments (MITI, 2020), and a bilateral investment treaty has signed between Malaysia and Bangladesh in October 1994 that came into force in 1996.

However, the trade had been maintained with Bangladesh in the first regime of Tun Mahathir Mohamed as Prime Minister of Malaysia was facing severe imbalance that shows a massive deficit in the volume of export of Bangladesh, and on the other hand, the import volume was unnaturally high. From this imbalance in trade, Malaysia benefitted immensely, which reasonably happened because of well productions of necessary items that Bangladesh imported and utilized in the country's development projects and used and consumed in their daily life. Malaysia made it possible to export a range of trading items to Bangladesh that includes almost all necessary items people usually use in their everyday lives. Malaysian diplomacy also successfully established favourable relations with Bangladesh that helped increase its business volume. Though the bilateral agreements between Malaysia and Bangladesh opened new doors and widened the cooperation, Bangladesh's diplomatic effort could not reach their optimism. For example, it is still struggling with free trade agreement (FTA) that could broaden Bangladesh's opportunity to export many items to Malaysia during the 1990s when Malaysia started to sign this agreement with many other countries.

3.3.3 Socio-Cultural Exchange

Malaysia iterates gratitude about the service of Bangladeshi doctors, engineers and others and the academic and training facilitated by Bangladeshi professionals to Malaysia regarding socio-cultural contact (M. o. F. Malaysia, 1983). In terms of cultural exchange, an agreement signed on the Youth and Sports Cooperation and Cultural Exchange Program in 1994 built a bonding between one society to another of these two nations. Furthermore, in October 1994, Malaysia offered more scholarships and training facilities to Bangladeshi students, and in August 1997, Malaysia came up with humanitarian support to Bangladesh by aiding a hundred thousand dollars for the flood victims in Bangladesh (Malaysia, 1997). In addition, many Bangladeshi academicians have been working in various public and private universities as part of educational cooperation, and many students are studying in Malaysia (Haque, 2004).

Malaysia and Bangladesh signed a protocol for the years 1986-87. In October 1994, an agreement signed on bilateral sports and culture helped explore the sports cooperation between two nations. Furthermore, the smooth exchange of information and media activities between Malaysia and Bangladesh was facilitated through the agreement on information cooperation signed in September 1994. Moreover, in April 1998, an agreement on a cultural exchange program was penned. Through these series of agreements, a cordial bilateral relation was established among both nations. Besides, many Malaysian nationals live in Bangladesh for trade and business and educations. The Malaysian government and various business companies have been operating their trade and development activities in various projects in Bangladesh. Several companies make investments there, and for which they have to live in Bangladesh, sometimes along with their family members. Thus, a Malaysian community in Bangladesh performs different social and cultural activities like celebrating eid festivals, new year programs, national day celebrations, and programs rejoiced by the business chambers and Malaysian high commission in Dhaka. Hence, a domain of societal and cultural cooperation had been established.

Additionally, religious practices like daily prayers in mosques, celebrating eid festivals and other Muslim religious activities performed by the Bangladeshi community lived in Malaysia. In both countries, the Tablighi Jamaat groups were active with their missionary programs to preach Islam's ideas at home and abroad. These indistinguishable thoughts of Islam have made a bridge of brotherhood between these two states that they exchange by travelling to both countries vice versa. Since the most prominent Tablighi Jamaat program, the 'Biswa Istema,' is held in Bangladesh every year, a number of followers visit Bangladesh and attend that program. This connection has also widened the avenue of Islamic cooperation between Malaysia and Bangladesh. Similarly, both nations have been maintaining Islamic collaboration in line with the spirit of OIC and D8 as vital members.

Since the period of undivided India and before the independence of Bangladesh, students from Malaysia travelled to Bangladesh, especially for taking Islamic education. During the 1980s and 1990s, it happened as part of the South Asia bound journey to study Islamic education, especially the Madrasa education that literally held with India and Pakistan. The other scene is that like the ancestral trend of professional service, several university teachers and other professionals hailed from Bangladesh have still been working in Malaysia.

4. Discussion

The contact of Malaysia with Bangladesh since the earlier period and during the Tun Mahathir administration has created a realm of solid relationships between the two states. The foreign policy approach of Malaysia has been positive since the commencement of the bilateral relationship. It was supportive of Bangladesh and gained economic benefit through operating trade and making investments in several industrial sectors in Bangladesh. Similarly, the migrated labour-based foreign currency from Malaysia, Bangladesh, was expanding its domestic development projects alongside other countries. This time, Bangladesh needed technical assistance and foreign direct investment to grow its economic development, opening new windows for many countries to invest in Bangladesh. Malaysia has also taken this new opportunity to consolidate its relationship with Bangladesh by initiating export-oriented trade and investing capital in various emerging industries like construction, oil-gas, telecom, etc. The trade volume of Malaysia was rapidly increasing during the Tun Mahathir Mohamad period, 1981 to 2003, where the trade with Bangladesh contributed hugely. Malaysia has exported immense products to Bangladesh, which is considered a big market for Malaysia (Economics, 2020). On the other hand, Bangladesh also exported a few goods to Malaysia besides the labour force.

It is evident that Malaysia was drastically feeling the necessity of labour force since the 1980s to add the rapidity to the development projects existing and the newly initiated for the country's overall economic development. Despite having other source countries for workers, Malaysia chose Bangladesh in this connection. Since then, the existing relation of Malaysia with Bangladesh renewed and consolidated. This situation was a lucrative interest both for Malaysia and Bangladesh because of the nation's economic development. Hence, the relation over migrant's labour was one of the vital social, and economic aspects Malaysia and Bangladesh enjoyed from 1981 to 2003. Malaysia had used the cheap labours from Bangladesh for its infrastructure development and the positive increment of the agriculture, construction, manufacturing and service sectors. Similarly, Bangladesh wanted to highest use the opportunity exporting workforce since it added considerable remittances through foreign currency in its gross national income (Ullah, 2011).

By deploying the Bangladeshi labours in their development activities, Malaysia made its progression, and by exporting the human resource to Malaysia, Bangladesh benefitted economically as well. Unfortunately, the Bangladeshi labours in Malaysia did not treat all the time reasonably. Bangladesh labours did not get a pleasant societal environment and sometimes could not enjoy the right living places because of an unhealthy situation. This unwelcomed situation made a kind of social isolation for the Bangladeshi labours who worked in Malaysia. Occasionally they faced discrimination in getting remuneration and were compelled to work extended hours without getting extra payment (Federation, 2014). As a result, a stance of dissatisfaction created within the Bangladeshi labours had been working in Malaysia.

Moreover, the Bangladeshi labours are with mere literacy that prevents them from understanding the rules and regulations concerning their conduct, jobs, and other areas. Because of this illiteracy, many Bangladeshi labours breach the laws related to their daily works (Abdul-Aziz, 2001). Because of violating laws and other irregularities done by the labours, employers, employment agents, or officials in Malaysia and Bangladesh, relations between these two nations deteriorated

sometimes and suspended the labour migration process. However, despite such limitations, both the government of Malaysia and Bangladesh mutually benefitted from this labour transaction.

The reciprocal cultural exchange and cooperation were enhanced extensively. During the 1980s, both Malaysia and Bangladesh were the least developed countries. They shared the views and ideas in many spheres of culture. As Muslim nations, they were closely connected in terms of exchanging Islamic culture like Islamic education and the propagation of the ideas through the missionary activities of Tablighi Jamaat (Conflict, 2017). Since the early days of the relationships, many professionals like university teachers, engineers, and doctors worked in Malaysia, and they used to get technical and training assistance from Malaysia. From 1981 to 2003, such cooperation geared up and increased through other new cooperations. The labours and other groups living in Malaysia created the practising tradition of various events like celebrating several days nationally significant in Bangladesh, eid-ul-Fitr, eid-ul-Adah, and others. The Malaysian community living in Bangladesh also celebrated various remarkable days and events significant in Malaysia and Bangladesh.

The issues and activities in the relation between Malaysia and Bangladesh increased and diversified adequately. From 1981 to 2003, many new windows opened and widened in societal, trade and commerce and the socio-religious and cultural arena. Within various limitations, the aspects of relationships have been nurtured and forwarded further with bilateral diplomatic practice. Many favourable subjects brought them a closed position from the 1980s to the early year of the current century. The labour migration, new trade and commerce and investment opportunities for Malaysia to Bangladesh, new fields of cultural cooperation were the basis for elevating the bilateral relationship. As a part of the Asian diaspora, workers migration to Malaysia from Bangladesh has been considered a vital part of the migration that has a bilateral and global impact and kept financial contribution to both countries' development and economy. Hence, this study provides a picture of the plight and pride of migrated workers and the happiness derived from their occupational life.

Malaysia extended its overseas investment area, especially to Bangladesh, which could be known from further research findings. Therefore, by further research, a resource for knowledge would build about Malaysia's volume of investment in Bangladesh. An elevated picture of the economic contribution that materialized because of operating trade and investment in Bangladesh from Malaysia will come to light. Most importantly, the existing educational cooperation, service of professionals and cultural connection extended during the regime of Tun Mahathir as the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia. The image of missionary activities of Tablighi Jamaat and the exchange of Islamic education between these two states have been firmly indicated. The religious affinity and similar cultural practices among these duos have brought them closer to promoting peace and stability in the international arena, where people to people relations are also maintained peaceably. Some occasional annoyances (Colachal, 2008) arise within these two nations' relationships that are sometimes visible over labour migration issues but managed with friendly diplomatic manners where the economic and social aspects are prioritized.

5. Conclusion

Many issues and sub-issues of Malaysia's relationships with Bangladesh has still yet to analyze intricately. Therefore, further research on this subject matter is intently recommended. It anticipates that such further study will bring many credible new findings of the economic and societal issues with which people and the government of Malaysia and Bangladesh are still, directly and indirectly, involved reciprocally. The present finding indicates a vast bilateral contact and connection practice involving trade and investment, societal development, and religious-cultural exchange. Following these linkages of bilateralism, further study would reveal the strengths and drawbacks of the existing relationship between these two nations concerning society and economy. The stipulated findings could help fulfil the shortcomings in understanding the inter-relations and future way forward about bilateralism between Malaysia and Bangladesh.

However, the preliminary analysis shows that the specific consequence of Tun Mahathir eyeshot towards Malaysia's Relationship with Bangladesh is multidimensional and has pertinency of studying further. Firstly, a firm study would unfold the components of relationships to determine the Malaysian government attitude to diplomatic promptness. Research considering these aspects can define the basis and circumstances of one state's response to another, aspects of bilateralism and multilateralism. The diplomatic loopholes in labour migration, trading and investment, and socio-cultural exchange would be identified by conducting a complete study. Secondly, the economic contact and relations may underpin, which would help get the idea and impression concerning the commercial relationship between Malaysia and Bangladesh. It will also make it understandable how Malaysia and Bangladesh benefitted from the transaction of the labour force. Such research will look to the picture of trade and investment from Malaysia to Bangladesh, which made both countries' economies progression. The outcome on the trade, investment and economic issues would be determined particular loopholes in bilateral trade in a reasonable manner.

Thirdly, the workforce sourced from Bangladesh to Malaysia is directly related to both countries' economic development. Therefore, elevated research can present the working force's pride and plight that migrated from Bangladesh. In this way, a picture could come to light about the social relation and citizens' social activities reciprocally performed in Malaysia as the Malaysian society is hugely crowded by the people who migrated from Bangladesh. Fourthly, the religious, educational, sports, and other existing cultural cooperation and technical assistance would be put together to provide an elaborate bilateral relation of intra and inter-societal involvement of both countries.

Finally, new research on Malaysia's relationships with Bangladesh will facilitate respective state and non-state actors and academic researchers with new knowledge of the bilateral socio-economic history and international relations. Furthermore, concerned decision-makers would be knowledgeable about the reciprocal foreign relations on diaspora issues and business and societal exchange aspects. Researchers will be able to consult the stipulated results from the possible brand new study for elevated research.

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