

Foreign policy objectives of Bangladesh

A country like Bangladesh can only react to, but not act on any major international issue. Bangladesh, therefore, has to combine its military strength with "constructive diplomacy" in order to promote its foreign policy objectives, Dr. G. W. CHOUDHURY writes on Bangladesh foreign policy and what he thinks should be its fundamental goals.

A country's foreign policy is not formulated in a vacuum. The foreign policy and its goals are shaped by geo-political factors, search for security, needs for economic assistance, promotion of the country's ideology and national interests. It is a fundamental rule of International politics that every country tries to maximise the benefits and minimise the adverse effects of any particular International environment.

A country like Bangladesh can only react to, but not act on any major international issue. Bangladesh, therefore, has to combine its military strength with "constructive diplomacy" in order to promote its foreign policy objectives. What are or what should be Bangladesh's foreign policy objectives? I consider the following as fundamental goals of Bangladesh foreign policy:

(1) To maintain its independence and territorial integrity. Very few countries of the world have sacrificed so many human lives for the achievement of Independence as Bangladesh did. Any dent in its territorial integrity and sovereignty will not be tolerated by the people of Bangladesh. The prime goal of Bangladesh foreign policy, therefore, is to seek security against any threat to its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

(2) Bangladesh is one of the developing countries of the

world. Thanks to the centuries of neglect and exploitation, first under the British colonial rule, then "under a neo-colonial system" of nearly two and half decades, Bangladesh needs economic help and assistance to carry out its gigantic programme of improving economic conditions of its people. The present Government has vigorously applied itself to the task of economic development. In order to carry this ambitious and legitimate programme Bangladesh would seek economic assistance from any quarter without political strings or condition affecting its national self-respect.

(3) Bangladesh is based on the ideals and ideology of Bangladeshi nationalism and its spiritual heritage viz., the teaching and ideals of Islam.

What are the diplomatic options and alternatives for Bangladesh to secure these fundamental objectives of its foreign policy? To my mind the rationale of Bangladesh constructive diplomacy and foreign policy should be based on the following—

(1) It should maintain friend-

ly and closer relations with its immediate neighbours, such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Burma, Nepal as well as countries of South-East Asia. Meaningful co-operation with Asian neighbours particularly in economic sphere, is highly desirable and needed for Bangladesh.

(2) We are bound with the countries of the Muslim world by our cultural and spiritual heritage. This link springs from the age-old bonds based on our cultural, religious and spiritual legacy. Nothing can break this link. It is, therefore, encouraging to see that Bangladesh is developing its relation with the countries of the Muslim world rapidly and in constructive ways. President Zia has done considerable progress in achieving the goal of closer co-operation with the Muslim countries. This goal should be pursued consistently and persistently.

Major Powers and Bangladesh:

As pointed out earlier, a developing country like Bangladesh can only react to but not act on any major international

problems which are largely shaped by the major powers. The two super powers (USA and USSR) and the emerging Asian great power, China may be regarded as the main actors of International politics. Industrialised nations of Western Europe and Japan are also two important centres of contemporary world politics. Bi-polarity of power based on the cold war of two super powers, United States and USSR has gone and a multipolar world has emerged.

Bangladesh has to conduct its foreign policy in the contemporary multi-polar world. We must make all endeavours to promote meaningful relations with three major powers — USA, USSR and China. To maintain simultaneous good relationship with Washington and Peking is no longer a problem. In fact it may be conducive to our national interests. So Bangladesh should make every effort to develop closer and friendly relationship with the United States and China. China has already responded to President Zia's initiatives warmly. The growing

co-operation in all spheres between China and Bangladesh has become cardinal feature of Bangladesh foreign policy. It is a healthy development and the process should be continued vigorously and sincerely.

Thanks to the growing Sino-Soviet conflict, it is becoming difficult for the countries of the Third World to maintain simultaneous good relation with Moscow and Peking. Japan's current difficulties in having a friendship treaty with China, which is not directed against any third country, is an example of such difficulties.

The foreign policy makers in Bangladesh should maintain "genuine" non-alignment in any big power politics. While friendship with China has been highly beneficial to Bangladesh, we must not give unnecessary provocation to any major power, neither China would want us to do so. Therefore, Bangladesh should try to maintain good relationship with other major powers.