

Practice of the Muslim Brotherhood between Malaysia And Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Socio-religious contact and practice of the Muslim brotherhood between contemporary Malaysia and Bangladesh are responsive, robust, and cordial and have been maintained reciprocally since the early days. Their historical linkages commemorate through multidimensional correspondence with due attention to socio-cultural relationships. This paper aims to examine the genesis of socio-religious contact and practice of the Muslim brotherhood aspects that crop up in the relationships of Malaysia and Bangladesh from the early days to the contemporary period. Over time the reciprocal cooperation between these two nations reached a legitimately accepted position. The bilateral socio-religious strands were favourable to each other and got well-precedence. The relation is symptomatic by traditional and a new bilateral buildout exercising all societal promptness, including religious and friendly Muslim brotherhood collaboration and cooperation. From this viewpoint, outlining the features of these two country's thought-provoking socio-religious relationships and people to people connections established through the practice of Islamic activities is time expedient. This study applies the historiographic approach and consults the primary and secondary literature, including reports, files and agreements, newspapers, and books and articles. The significance of the finding of this study is the answer back to the questions regarding the features and phenomena of both country's reciprocating and noteworthy Islamic and religious practices with Muslims considering the Muslim brotherhood.

Keywords: *Bangladesh, Malaysia, Society, Religion, Muslim brotherhood*

1.0 Introduction

Malaysia and Bangladesh have been in a traditional and warm tie regarding socio-religious affiliation. In the early period, the territory of Malaysia was the prominent old Malay Peninsula, and the bounded area of Bangladesh was a part of ancient Bengal (present Bangladesh and Indian Province West Bengal) when both of these two geographical entities were the host of the Hindu-Buddhist religion and culture. In the medieval period, they exercised the Islamic culture, followed by the practice of Islamic norms in the modern period under the British colonial administration. After the Independence of Malaysia in the 1950s, Malaysia and Bangladesh have started Muslim brotherhood practice though Bangladesh was part of Pakistan. The socio-religious promptness and Muslim brotherhood activities between Malaysia and Bangladesh became prominent after Bangladesh's independence in 1971 and with the establishing of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) was established. As the member countries of OIC, both the nations came at the closest position concerning the cooperation of Islamic brotherhood. The Socio-religious elements are active in the relationships of the nations across the globe today. The sovereign territories have been connected bilaterally or multilaterally with the practice of socio-religious culture. In the context of the Southeast Asian and Indian connection, Malaysia and Bangladesh have been maintaining socio-religious relationships since early times based on the Hindu-Buddhist culture (Glover, 1990, p. 9). Both the nations

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engaged in new relationships after Bangladesh becoming an independent nation in 1971 (Chandola, 1972). In the genesis of that latest relationship after becoming a new nation and in reciprocal cooperation, Bangladesh got technical assistance in the agriculture sector whereas, Malaysia got educational support for its students studying in Bangladesh. Gradually, they opened many new spheres of interaction through professional assistance, labour migration, educational exchange, and the Tablighi missionary movement alongside the Muslim friendship relationships. In the subsequent days, the socio-cultural strands of these two nations got well-precedence, even up to the dates that have symptomatic by the exercise of social, religious and Muslim brotherhood.

In Malaysia, the Islamisation and Muslim brotherhood spread out through Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) and led by Anwar Ibrahim during the 1990s when Malaysia witnessed a new Malay-Muslim middle class in the country (Malek, 2011, pp. 8, 80-82). Southeast Asia's influence materialised has been significant in Islamic practice for at least the last seven centuries among uniquely diverse cultures and economic dimensions (Hill, 2017, p. 1). Before becoming an independent, political Islam was conceived in Malaysia through the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party-PMIP (PAS), where the oldest big political party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), also emphasised Islam. Simultaneously, the Malaysian role in the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) shows its we-connection with Islamic Ummah or Muslim Brotherhood (Weiss, 2017, p. 8). Even the administration Tun Mahathir Mohamad and UMNO lead government sponsored the Islamic education and banking alongside the activities of PAS, ABIM, Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia and Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (ISMA) who worked with the strength of Malaysian Muslim spirits (Chinyong Liow, 2015, pp. 2-3).

Likewise, currently, Bangladesh is the country with a majority Muslim population with a third largest position globally that became independent with the spirit of secular nationalism by the nine-month-long war with West Pakistan in 1971. Country's first Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has initiated good relationships with Muslim nations in the world that were also practically necessary to recognise the nation as independent sovereignty, later managed membership Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) for the country. This nation gradually transforms from secular nationalism to an influential Islamic position after the assassination of its first Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, through the madrasa, mosques and Islamic mass conferences like 'wajmahfils' and the activities of Tablighi Jamat and Sufi culture (Hasan, 2012). In this majority 'Sunni' populated nation, Sufism spread out during the fourteen century when materialised the meeting and mingling with Hindu-Buddhist religious ideas in the early territory of Bangladesh (Kibria, 2011, p. 11). However, since the 1990s, some so-called Islamic belief-based parties like Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB) and Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh (HTB) have become active. Jamat e Islami Bangladesh (JIB) (Hasan, 2011) appeared as the extremist Islamic political party in Bangladesh who had the anti-independent stand and participating in killing, atrocities and women abusing with the collaboration of the west Pakistani military, though they wanted the 'Law of Allah' and 'Law of Sariah' in Bangladesh.

In this Islamic cultural environment, like other dimensions of relationships, there was a convention of socio-religious exchange between Malaysia and Bangladesh since the early days of the contact. *"Our two countries have always enjoyed close and cordial relations since we established diplomatic relations in April 1972. The close relations that exist between Bangladesh and Malaysia have been reflected in the cooperation between our two countries in the social, cultural, economic, educational and technical fields,"* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1983) stated Tun Mahathir Mohamed when he visited Bangladesh in 1983. Nevertheless, the academic research and published articles failed to present the social life and the new sphere of society for the Bangladeshi people in Malaysia. The issues of social networks, programs, and festivals performed by the Bangladesh migrants in Malaysia have been ignored (Uddin & Mohammed, 2020) or merely presented in the academic discourses.

The historiographic approach and literature-based analysing approach have been applied for conducting this study. Though this study's previous literature is strewn, some distinct primary and secondary literature offers optimal information. The study's significance is that it would outline new sets of features of the religion-based culture and Islamic stream of societal norms exercised between these two Muslim-populated nations of Asia. The findings will also be compatible with any further study of bilateral and international relations issues between nations.

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2.0 Problem Statement

The relationships of Malaysia and Bangladesh will mark fifty-year in 2022 since Malaysia recognised Bangladesh as a sovereign nation in 1972. The relation has resilience, and the ties were unique and indispensable that still investing effort to enhance the cooperation in trade and investment and labour movement and capacity building (Louis, 2021). Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamic fundamentalist movement initiated in 1928 by an Egyptian schoolteacher Hasan Al Banna to revitalise the concept of Islam and impose Islamic regulations in the arena of society (Oxford Reference, 2021). A one-step-ahead latest role of Malaysia in terms of Muslim brotherhood saw in December 2019 when the like-minded Muslim nations aimed to get together for the sake of Islamic exposé and pressing OIC, and Gulf nations stand on Muslim issues together in Kuala Lumpur (Alhasan, 2020).

In this connection, the relationships between Malaysia and Bangladesh are expedited based on the Muslim brotherhood. Such a bilateral buildout in Muslim brotherhood has consolidated the societal issues of professionals, labours and students, and other cultural exchanges. From this outlook, examining socio-religious facets and Muslim solidarity that is significantly evident in Malaysia and Bangladesh's relationships is time appropriate that merely got a preference in the previous academic research. Therefore, this research deals with the aspects of Muslim brotherhood between Malaysia and Bangladesh, socio-religious practices, analyses and presents the notions of the historical background of the two countries relationships and especially examine the aspects of socio-religious and Muslim association that have been existing between modern Malaysia and Bangladesh.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Southeast Asia and South Asia

Bangladesh's diplomatic relation with Southeast Asian countries was related to the relation between India and Bangladesh, and this dimension sometimes determines the multilateral relation of India, Bangladesh and South Asia (Pattanayak, 2009). Few value worthy books offer the historical taste of Malaysian foreign policy from which some ideas could be loaned to understand the overall attitude of the early governance of the federation of Malaysia. Among them, one of the most notable books written by Anthony S. K. Shome. In *'Malay Political Leadership'*, the author stated that the foreign policy of Tun Mahathir Mohamad was a kind of blend type of the policies with the 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). Saravanamuttu described some issues of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and various countries and regions in *'The Dilemma of Independence: Two Decades of Malaysia's Foreign Policy 1957-1977'* (Saravanamuttu J. , 1983) that also offers the historical background of the international relations on which modern Malaysia's foreign policy has stood up, but not any aspects of Southeast Asia. In another book entitled *'Malaysia's Foreign Policy, the First Fifty Years-Alignments, Neutralism, Islamism,'* Johan examined the background of the development of the foreign policy of Malaysia. It also analysed the bilateral and multilateral issues of diplomatic relations of Tun Mahathir's era (1981-2003) (Saravanamuttu J. , 2010), but the South Asian region did not get importance in his discussion in this book.

The *'Malaysia: Fifty Years of Diplomacy 1957-2007'* has illustrated the foreign relation of Malaysia from the independence of the country to the early twenty-first century (Jeshurun, 2007). In this text, some aspects of India and Pakistan's relation with Malaysia have analysed as the issues related to South Asian countries. The *'Tengku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia's Foreign Policy 1963-1970'* of Dato Abdullah Ahmad provides a clear idea of the determinants of Malaysia's overseas relations since the formation of the federation and the end of the rule of Tunku Abdul Rahman. This text has also offered a good concept of the background of Malaysian foreign policy (Ahmad, 1985). *'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 on streamlining Malaysia's foreign relation (Bowie, 2006).

Moreover, two essential books on Malaysia's foreign policy and foreign relations as fourth prime minister during the Tun Mahathir period were written by Dhillon and edited by Welsh. These are *'Malaysian Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Era 1981-2003-Dilemma of Development'* (Dhillon, 2009) and *'Reflection: The Mahathir Years'* (Welsh, 2004). However, the above mentioned scholarly texts did not include Bangladesh's relationships with Malaysia as the subject matter.

3.2 Malaysia-Bangladesh

S. R. Chakravarty edited the *'Foreign Policy of Bangladesh'* that is the collection of several articles. It contained the source of the early relation between Bangladesh and other countries, including the superpowers like the USA, UK, USSR and China (Chakravarty, 1994). Virendra Narain, in his book *'Foreign Policy of Bangladesh (1971-1981)'* analysed the significant issues of the background of the liberation war of Bangladesh (Narain, 1987). The most relevant background information on Malaysia and Bangladesh's bilateral diplomatic and socio-economic relation comes from the book entitled *'Pakistan and Malaysia: A comparative Study in National Integration'* written by M. Nazrul Islam (Islam M. N., 1989). Mohammed Ayoob examined a few issues related to Bangladesh during the liberation war of 1971 in his article entitled *'Southeast Asia in Indian Foreign Policy: Some Preliminary observations'* (Ayoob, 1987). *'Transformation of Rural Communities in Asia'* by Yoshimi Komoguchi provides a comparative narration on some particular regions of Bangladesh and Malaysia. The author revealed diverse aspects regarding the agricultural pattern of Bangladesh through his fieldwork-based research. This text did not discuss bilateral diplomatic relations but the issues from the second half of the 20th century over agriculture and others (Komoguchi, 2000).

One of the vital components of the bilateral diplomatic relation between Malaysia and Bangladesh is the Bangladeshi migrant labour who have been working in various industrial sectors in Malaysia. 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 book *'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 (Molla, Murad, & Alam, 2013). An immensely worthy and most relevant discussion was 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 materialised 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. The literature mentioned above did not explore the complete set of socio-religious and bilateral Islamic friendship issues of these two Asian nations during the Tun Mahathir Mohamad administration from 1981 to 2003. Therefore, the research gap on the Muslim brotherhood and religious contact between Malaysia and Bangladesh is still an academic discourse yet to discover.

4.0 Materials and Methods

Literature about the socio-religious relation and Muslim brotherhood spirit between Malaysia and Bangladesh is remarkably insufficient. Few published journal articles and books have supplied some valuable data. Though the formal socio-religious contact between these two states has started immediately after Bangladesh's independence, the official documents are still remain unfolded. As a result, this study has consulted various secondary literature that has analysed few issues over the societal aspects and mainly the social activities of the people of Bangladesh temporarily living in Malaysia.

From this viewpoint, this study applies the historiographic approach and literature-based analysis. Some specific primary and secondary literature has been consulted to gather optimal information. As primary sources, different occasional and annual reports of government and non-government organisations have been reviewed alongside the government agreements and documents. In this connection, libraries of the organisations related to their foreign affairs and the archives have been visited. It has also consulted some unexposed official reports through archival research that provides original data and information. Published books, journal articles, newspapers, and relevant internet sources have provided pertinent information as secondary sources. The Malaysia's Foreign Ministry journal provided much significant material like the Hansard, communique and state premier and minister's speeches of Malaysia and Bangladesh. *'The Strait Times'* of Singapore and some other Newspapers also offered original information on the common socio-cultural issues and bilateral cooperation.

5.0 Result

5.1 Background of relationships

The relationships between the Malay Peninsula and Bengal can be traced since the ancient period when Malay territory was known as 'Golden Khersonese' or the Peninsula of Gold because of the availability of the abundant resource (Wheatley, 1961, p. 279). Bengal comprised several townships (Janapada) like *Vanga*, *Samatata*, *Harikela*, *Gauda*, *Radha*, *Pundra*, *Varendra*, and *Suhma* (Majumdar, 1971, pp. 1, 6-14) that had socio-cultural uniqueness (Akhtar & Khondaker, 2021). Gradually, this relation got other diverse dimensions. Malaysia's prehistoric culture was revealed through the discoveries of the archaeological site of Kota Tempan where Professor Zuraina Majid and her team conducted excavation and extensive research. It brought to light an in-situ stone tool workshop of the Paleolithic age in the Lenggong Valley that was relatively dated 74,000 years back (Majid & TJIA, 1988). In terms of early relationships, Jim Baker stated that Indian culture, in the early period, was the cornerstone that paved the pre-modern and pre-colonial society of Malaya (Baker, 2000, p. 36). By the maritime trade, Indian products came in the Malay Archipelago through the Bay of Bengal since the 5th century BCE in respect of foreign trade connection (Akhtar & Idris, 2020). Kedah, the Malay Peninsula port city, was influenced mainly by Bengal traders who travelled from the Tamralipti port of Bengal (Penzer, 1924, p. 153) that prove the ancient Bengal's manipulation over Kedah (Allen, 1998). Such pictures show that Indian influences were prominent and established a bilateral maritime relationship since the early period.

During the mediaeval period, the newly established Malay state Melaka had a connection with India since the fourteenth century. Later, the nineteenth century was a period when the British East India Company had been influencing both in the Malay Peninsula and in Bengal. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, British influence started in Bengal (present Bangladesh and the West Bengal province of India) and the Malay land at the end of the eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century, British EIC in Bengal backed British power in the Malay Peninsula to influence and control its administration by establishing a bilateral relation between the Malay world and Bengal (Kennedy, 1965, p. 68).

Since becoming an independent state in 1957, Malaysia has maintained a close relationship with Pakistan. This time, Malaysian foreign policy was formulated with the promotion of the ideas of regional cooperation. Being a founding member country of the Organization of the Islamic Countries (OIC), since 1970, Malaysia got new friends in the Muslim world. As an independent country with a Muslim majority, Bangladesh had been prioritised in Malaysia's foreign policy (Othman, 2013, pp. 8-16).

Bangladesh's customary history derived from an early age when the Indo-Aryan population migrated from overseas between 2,500 and 3,000 years back. Ancient literature offers evidence of the historical period of Bengal, and it referred to the Gupta period of Bengal as the initiating point of Bengal history, that was the Gupta period prevailing up to 550 CE. After the Gupta period, Bengal was ruled by various rulers (Majumdar, 1971, pp. 30-31). Before coming to the Pala dynasty rule in 750 CE, there was a sort of instability in ancient Bengal (French, 1928, pp. 1-2), and the Pala rule continued for around 150 years from the mid-eighth century. After that, Chandra, Varmans and Sena dynasties (Majumdar, 1971, pp. 199, 206-221) enjoyed the ancient Bengal's political power. In 1204 CE Bengal came under Muslim rule with the invasion of Bakhtiar Khilji that virtually established the Delhi based Sultani and Mughal rule in Bengal (Eaton, 1993, p. 13).

Bengal had a diplomatic relation with the ancient Southeast Asian nations, especially with the Malay peninsula. This relationship consolidated through maritime trade and cultural contact. Along with other Malay Peninsula regions, Bengal had the bilateral trade and cultural relation with ancient Kedah that referred to the Indian text as *Kathaha* (Akhtar & Idris, 2020; Wheatley, 1961, p. 279). Indian Emperor Ashok sent three of his royal ambassadors to Kedah to preach the ideas of Buddhist religion in the fourth century BCE (Jermasawati, 1977, p. 17) that shows the cultural contact of Bengal with the ancient Malay world.

During the colonial period, Bengal was in close contact with the Malay Peninsula. In the 16th century, the European power started to come to Bengal, and the Portuguese were the first European nation to trade in Bengal. However, in 1757, the British East India Company captured Bengal by the victory in the Battle of Palashi. It ruled Bengal for around 200 years up to 1947 when British power granted independence through a segregated manner

by dividing the Indian territory as India and Pakistan. Bangladesh was part of Pakistan as 'East Pakistan' at that time. Bangladesh emerged as an independent country by a 9-month long bloody battle with West Pakistan in 1971 (Islam S. , 2003). The most vital sign of warm bilateral relation between Malaysia and Bangladesh was Malaysia's recognition of Bangladesh as an independent nation that officially happened on 25 February, 1972 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1972).

5.2 Socio-religious relationships and Muslim Brotherhood

In 1972 the formal bilateral relationship commenced when Malaysia was a matured independent state for around 15 years, and Bangladesh was the newly formed nation-state (Associated Press Archive, 2020). During the first Bangladesh government delegates visit to Malaysia in 1972, Malaysia assured supporting Bangladesh's admission into the United Nations and other agencies. This time, Malaysia expressed its intention to send two rubber-producing experts and technical assistance for rice and jute plantation. Malaysia's government got assurance about the reentry of Malaysian students studying in different institutions of Bangladesh (previously East Pakistan) and left the country due to the liberation war (Chandola, 1972).

This time several political parties of Malaysia expressed their concern about the newly established Muslim Nation-state, Bangladesh. Malaysian political party's concern about Bangladesh can trace from the parliamentary discussion over various issues related to building a relationship between Malaysia and Bangladesh, Bangladesh's relation with Pakistan and many others. In response to the question of several members of Parliament (MP), Malaysia's foreign and Prime Minister informed parliament regarding offering assistance in economy, education and training initiatives (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1972a). The prime minister also stated the establishing high commission in Dhaka and sending commissioner (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1972b) and Malaysia's position about Bangladesh-Pakistan issues and relation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1972a, p. 123).

In such a way, Malaysia and Bangladesh's friendly relations became much more potent by establishing the high commission in Dhaka in November 1972 and later appointing commissioners. Similarly, in April 1973, the first High Commissioner from Bangladesh was appointed to Kuala Lumpur (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1973, p. 109). A visit of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Malaysia on 24 October 1973 (National Archive Malaysia, 2020a), and His Majesty King Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah to Bangladesh in December 1974 signified the two nation's relationships remarkably (National Archive Malaysia, 2020b). In this stage of the relationship, Malaysia co-sponsored the resolution at the latest General Assembly session of the United Nations to Bangladesh's admission to this premier global body. Both the countries agreed to do the cultural exchange and educational and technical assistance by sponsoring scholarships and training bilaterally for the students and professionals staying in both countries vice-versa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1973). In April 1978, a cultural cooperation agreement was signed that encouraged bilateral cooperation in the education, science, literature, culture, and sports sectors (Bangladesh, 1978). They signed an agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation on 11 April 1979. They recognised the areas of relations between Malaysia and Bangladesh by denoting historical, cultural and religious ties and similar views pertaining to the world situation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1979).

Moreover, alongside the Muslim brotherhood, the relation between Malaysia and Bangladesh also extended in the field of aviation service. From the early period of the relationships, both countries connected through passenger flight operations. In this connection, an Air Services Agreement was signed in July 1978 in a foreign minister-level meeting held in Dhaka that determined the airports using permission issues and frequency of flight operation from both sides. This agreement eased the travelling of the peoples of concerned nations. Over the aviation service, several other agreements and memorandum of understanding were penned between these two countries in the latter-day.

In both countries' relationships, like many others, the aspects of Muslim brotherhood, socio-cultural practices, and the social position of the migrated workers and professionals living in Malaysia have been the prime discussing issues. In the areas of the reciprocal Islamic fraternity practised by Malaysia and Bangladesh, education and exchange of the missionary activities of Tablighi Jamaat are prioritised. There have been religious cooperation between the two nations in line with the spirit of OIC and D8. In terms of education, many students from

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Bangladesh have been studying in various higher educational institutions in Malaysia under the Malaysian government scholarship or at their own cost. Besides several teachers working in different universities as academics and other professionals like doctors, engineers and others in several institutions.

Similarly, many students from Malaysia have been attending different institutions in Bangladesh. The education trend of Malaysian students in Bangladesh started before Bangladesh's independence that has continued during the 1980s and 1990s and till today. Exercising socio-cultural cooperation from the early days to the current century is evident. Besides, over sports and cultural exchange, several agreements have been signed between the two nations. Since the aspect of the migrated workers is tremendously emitted subject, the social position and the picture of the daily life of the people worked in Malaysia has got significance in the spear of bilateral relationships. In June 1988, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar expressed that Malaysia and Bangladesh's mutual relationships will get further strength through existing cordiality, and Kuala Lumpur wants stronger ties and brotherly cooperation with Bangladesh (The Strait Times, 1988). In this connection, in 1990, Malaysia created an example of friendly cooperation with Bangladesh. At that time, the Gulf war crisis confined many Bangladeshi people in West Asia. Because of the air connection interruption with Bangladesh, she felt the necessity of help from any friendly country for its citizens' carriage to the home. That time Bangladesh got a Malaysian Airlines plane to evacuate the people confined there. Bangladesh Foreign Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud hailed the Malaysian government to do this friendly assistance (The Strait Times, 1990).

Malaysia and Bangladesh have a deep cultural understanding that even prevailed in the 1980s and 1990s and was built by various exposures arranged by both nations through their missions counterparts. In the year 1985, Bangladesh President Hussain Mohammed Ershad visited Malaysia. Among other bilateral activities, the honourable President attended a cultural show presented by a cultural group of Bangladesh in Kuala Lumpur. In the bilateral cultural aspect, Malaysia and Bangladesh signed a protocol for the year 1986-87, in line with the cultural agreement penned in 1978. This protocol outlined the issues for cooperation in education, science and technology, art, culture, sports and tourism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1985). In July 2000, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Kuala Lumpur and attended a reception program offered by the Malaysian government. In terms of social contact, the Malaysian Prime Minister has emphasised the people to people connection to strengthen the bilateral relation between Malaysia and Bangladesh in this program (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 2000). Transpiring the extended cooperation in the 1990s, the socio-religious relations between these two nations widened a great deal. In October 1994, during the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to Malaysia, an agreement was signed on bilateral sports and culture that helped explore the cooperation between two nations. The smooth exchange of information and media activities between Malaysia and Bangladesh facilitated the agreement on information cooperation signed in September 1994. Moreover, in April 1998, an agreement on a cultural exchange program was signed that aided in widening the avenue for cultural activities in both countries. Such socio-cultural cooperations extended through the Islamic spirit and diverse community functioning performed by the people and government of Malaysia and Bangladesh during the late couple of decades and early days of the twenty-first century.

Figure 1: Malaysia's Foreign Minister Tan Sri M. Ghazali Shafie addressing in an OIC conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1983.



Source: Journal of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, Vol.16, No. 4, p.455

Islamic fraternity reciprocally practised by Malaysia and Bangladesh has broadened the avenue of the relationships. In terms of socio-religious contact, the Tablighi missionary activities and Muslim cooperation between these two nations have developed in line with the spirit of OIC and D8. It has appeared that many students from Malaysia have been attending various levels of Islamic education in different Madrasas in Bangladesh. This trend started even before Bangladesh's independence that has continued during the 1980s and 1990s and till now. In this connection, in June 1988, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar said that they hope relations between Malaysia and Bangladesh will get further strength through existing cordiality, and Kuala Lumpur wants stronger ties and brotherly cooperation with Bangladesh (The Strait Times, 1988). Most interestingly, in 1990, Malaysia created an example of Muslim brotherhood cooperation with Bangladesh. Due to the Gulf crisis, many Bangladeshi people were confined in West Asia, and because of the air connection interruption with Bangladesh, she felt the necessity of help from any friendly country. That time Bangladesh got a Malaysian Airlines plane to evacuate the people confined there. Bangladesh Foreign Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud hailed the Malaysian government to do this friendly assistance (The Strait Times, 1990).

Muslim brotherhood has cemented the affinity built since Bangladesh's independence. In this connection, Malaysia's attitude towards Bangladesh was adequately positive and friendly from the very beginning. Malaysian Foreign Minister Tan Sri M. Ghazali Shafie had attended the 14th OIC Ministerial Conference in Dhaka in December 1983 when he praised the regional peace and Islamic solidarity maintained by Bangladesh in line with the spirit of OIC (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 1983). Islamic cultural similarity strengthened the bond of these two countries and resulted in the increment of the Bangladeshi labours in Malaysia since the starting of the 1990s (Roy, 2016). In line with socio-religious relations, they have enjoyed good bilateral relations based on common religion, history, and culture. Over the years, such contact extended in the arena of education exchange, tourism, culture and sport, technology transfer and human resource development, and their cooperation in Muslim brotherhood (Colachal, 2008).

Muslim brotherhood between these two Asian nations had consolidated among the new networks created in the 1980s when Malaysia desired to bring workers from Muslim countries, especially from Bangladesh. Selecting Bangladesh as one of the labours source countries has widened the window for the people of Bangladesh to enter Malaysia. This time Malaysia wanted to make a barrier at the influx of the Filipinos workers that fortunate the Bangladeshi people in migrating to Malaysia to whom this Southeast Asian country found the similar Islamic culture Bangladesh (Rudnick, 1996, p. 18). Dannecker opined that the Muslim brotherhood focused on the transnational solidarity between Malaysia and Bangladesh in line with global Islamic Ummah. This spirit made Bangladesh confident in keeping continuous ties even after Malaysia cancelled the previous agreements over labour migration in 1995 (Dannecker, 2013). Additionally, Malaysia also had a kind of fascination with the Islamic cultural practice of Bangladesh that the Premier of Malaysia expressed several times. In a reception program offered by Malaysia to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in Kuala Lumpur in 2000, the prime minister of Malaysia reiterated the cooperation among Muslim nations and Malaysia that consider Bangladesh an essential member of D8 and OIC. The honourable Prime Minister also expressed his will to work together with Bangladesh for the Muslim Ummah's wellbeing (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 2000).

The Tabligh Jamaat is another strong media of bonding between Malaysia and Bangladesh that was founded in the 1900s. Aiming to do the missionary movement to inculcate Islamic ideas among those who are seen as having differed from the Islamic way of life in search of materialistic improvement, Tablighi Jamaat started its movement. Though the activities were centred to Dhaka (the Kakrail Mosque), in Bangladesh, its growth and development were spectacular, where the participants were in almost all spheres of the society like students, teachers and other professional and ordinary people (Hasan, 2012). The Tablighi Jamaat also acted as a bridging element in the relationship between Malaysia and Bangladesh. The global missionary movement of Tablighi Jamaat has aimed to make Muslims the better Muslims who had the tradition of the India Deobandi sect and were born in the Islamic orthodoxy and within the intense rivalry between Muslims and Hindus in South Asia. Tablighi Jamaat took part in the first nationalist anti-colonial movements in British India in the early 20th century in its home by birth (Noor, 2012). The global movement has made Tablighi Jamaat popular and familiar across the world. They have been propagating their ideas of Islamic principles since the birth of Tablighi Jamaat in 1927 in India (Horstmann, 2007) through moving one place to another and one country to another.

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During the 1950s, the first group of Tablighi Jamaat arrived in the Southeast Asian region by entering Penang, Singapore and Medan in Sumatra in 1952 and Burma and British Malaya and Indonesia led by Maulana Haji Miaji Isa. Gradually, they gathered and consolidated their position in Java and Jakarta. Tablighi Jamaat people appeared in Kuala Lumpur widely after the independence of Malaysia (Noor, 2012). Like the role of Indian Muslims behind the first coming of Islam in Southeast Asia, Tablighi Jamaat aided the spreading of Islam's missionary propagation throughout this region along with its global transformation. Through Maulana Abdul Malik Madani's activities, who came to Singapore and Selangor in 1952 from India, Tablighi's spirit was introduced in Kuala Lumpur, where the initial target of the mission to reach the Indian-Muslim who had been lived there from earlier (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2008). Every year, Bangladesh held the Tablighi gathering called 'Biswa Ijtima', and thousands of followers of Tablighi Jamaat from Southeast Asia and across the world rush to that gathering. It is the second-largest gathering for the Muslim 'Umma' after the Hajj in Mecca. There was a historical link between Southeast Asia and Bangladesh regarding Islamic fundamentalism that expedited students' exchange. Several thousand Bangladesh students have been studying in different universities and colleges in Malaysia.

Similarly, the Malaysian students and the Indonesians and Thais travel to Bangladesh as part of their South Asian journey by using the connections exercised within the Tablighi activities. Another fraction of travellers move towards Bangladesh to operate their trade and business, and at the same time, includes Tablighi missionary activities in their itinerary. In this way, people from Malaysia and Bangladesh travel each month vis-versa as part of their 'khuruj' or 'cillah', the outbound group tour to propagate Tablighi spirit ideas (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2017). In addition, the Deobandi schools in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, have the tradition of indigenous madrasa education that was also popular in Malaysia and Indonesia. Students from Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Thailand travel to Bangladesh regularly with taking part in 40-day *khuruj* or *cillah* during the end of the academic year break (Reetz, 2013, p. 8).

6.0 Discussion and Conclusion

In the current bilateral relationships, alongside the cordial cooperation, Malaysia and Bangladesh have some challenges over the Bangladeshi community in Malaysia that is rife with uncertainties in terms of undocumented immigrant labours in this pandemic Covid-19 situation (Louis, 2021) is existing for many days. Nevertheless, the legacy of Islamic culture and Muslim brotherhood has exercised a strong bond that can trace back to the early days. The early connection between Malaysia and Bangladesh was based on the ancient Southeast Asian and Indian contact that had the Hindu-Buddhist religious interactions rather than Islamic contact. The strategic location of the territory of ancient Malaysia and Bangladesh helped to create the maritime trade connection, where the Malay world was between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, and the geographical position of Bangladesh has been as the world largest delta and on the Bay of Bengal that facilitated favourable maritime voyages. During the medieval period, Melaka based Islamic Malaysia also had contact with Indian people. In the modern and colonial era, the British colonial administration encouraged Indian people to enter Malaysia, especially South India. From the Bengal region, people also migrated to Southeast Asia and Malaysia. As the internal part of Bengal, Malaysia's connection with Bangladesh was not illogical.

Therefore, during the end of the colonial period and after the partition of India in 1947, Malaysia started an excellent connection with Pakistan, especially as an OIC member country. For the OIC strand, the two country's relationships were tremendously cordial, friendly and based on Muslim brotherhood. Malaysia maintained this Islamic culture-based contact and Muslim brotherhood with newly independent Bangladesh during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Even a friendly relationship between Malaysia and Bangladesh consolidated during the administration of Tun Mahathir Mohammad when he served Malaysia as its fourth Prime Minister. In line with the thought and strategies of OIC and D-8, the socio-religious relationships and Muslim brotherhood had been developing further among these two Asian friend countries, Malaysia and Bangladesh. Firstly, both these countries were linked through professional and technical assistance in the early days of the founding of Bangladesh. Secondly, by practising the social norms, they established bilateral cooperation by signing several agreements, memorandum of understanding, etc. Thirdly, during the Tun Mahathir period, the religious connection consolidated as the Muslim nations were one of the main focuses of the Mahathir administration. Hence, a history of the religious relationships between Malaysia and Bangladesh and the common practice of the Muslim Brotherhood would come to light through this research. It is hoped that the research findings will fulfil the vacuum

of Malaysia-Bangladesh contemporary international relations history, especially for the latter decades of the last century and at the incepting years of the 21st century.

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