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History and prospects of cooperation between Russia, India and Bangladesh in the field of nuclear energy

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Abstract. This article attempts to analyze the cooperation of the Russian Federation (RF) with India and the People's Republic of Bangladesh (PRB) in the field of nuclear energy in the light of its history, current state and near–term prospects. The author states that recently (since 2009–2014) the sectoral interaction has significantly strengthened and implementation of the main joint nuclear projects has intensified which gives a positive effect for the bilateral relations. Mutually beneficial and successful economic projects provide consensus and mutual understanding in the context of the rapid changes in the global geopolitical situation in 2022. The Ukrainian crisis and the large–scale economic sanctions against Russia led to a negative impact on the economies of most countries of the world. The issues of energy security in this situation have become one of the key factors. The continuation and development of contacts in the nuclear field becomes fundamentally important providing the new opportunities for the countries of South Asia (SA) to strengthen their own security and independence. The gathered partnership experience of the relevant cooperation between RF and SA in the nuclear field can contribute to the intensification of political ties between countries which are quite important in the light of fundamental changes in the world order. The relevance of the study implies studying the possibilities of the practical application of the gathered experience and potential of interaction between RF, India and Bangladesh aimed at determination of the optimal ways and directions of cooperation in the nuclear field and its further intensification.

Keywords: Russian Federation, India, People's Republic of Bangladesh, South Asia, nuclear energy, interaction and cooperation, potential and prospects, geopolitical changes, unipolar and multipolar world

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История и перспективы сотрудничества России с Индией и Бангладеш в сфере атомной энергетики

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Аннотация. Исследуется сотрудничество Российской Федерации с Индией и Народной Республикой Бангладеш в сфере атомной энергетики, в контексте ее истории, существующего уровня и ближайших перспектив. Автор констатирует, что за последнее время (начиная с 2009–2014 гг.) отраслевое взаимодействие существенно укрепилось, а реализация ключевых совместных атомных проектов интенсифицировалась, что, безусловно, положительно сказывается на двусторонних отношениях. Взаимовыгодные и успешные экономические проекты являются залогом консенсуса и взаимопонимания в условиях стремительных изменений геополитической ситуации в мире в 2022 г. Украинский кризис и последовавшие в связи с ним масштабные экономические санкции в отношении России негативно сказались на экономиках большинства стран мира. Вопросы энергетической безопасности в этой ситуации стали одними из ключевых. Продолжение и развитие контактов в атомной сфере приобретает принципиально иную значимость, открывая перед странами Южной Азии новые возможности для укрепления собственной безопасности и независимости. Накопленный партнерский опыт релевантного сотрудничества РФ и ЮА в атомной области может способствовать интенсификации контактов между странами, довольно важных в нынешнее время коренных изменений мирового порядка. Актуальность исследования заключается в изучении возможностей практического применения накопленного опыта и потенциала взаимодействия РФ с Индией и Бангладеш с целью определения оптимальных путей и направлений сотрудничества в атомной сфере и его дальнейшей интенсификации.

Ключевые слова: Российская Федерация, Индия, Народная Республика Бангладеш, Южная Азия, атомная энергетика, взаимодействие и сотрудничество, потенциал и перспективы, геополитические изменения, однополярный и многополярный мир

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Introduction

The Russian Federation (and the USSR as its predecessor), India and Bangladesh have traditionally had and still have friendly relations in a great number of cooperation areas. Civil nuclear power is a kind of symbol of this process. It should be noted that all three countries (albeit to the different extent) have accumulated creations, competencies and technologies that can be mutually beneficial for the development of new technologies in the usage of the peaceful atom. Industry interaction without politicization and the current conditions is a purely pragmatic and mutually beneficial project. This is proved by the energetic and strategically balanced activity of the political leaders of these countries including not only the economic dimension but also creation of the political partnership.

The events of 2022 (the Ukrainian conflict and the unprecedented sanctions against Russia related to this which however affected almost the rest of the world) demonstrated and revealed global problems associated with a global crisis of common interaction in a unipolar world, the imposition of opinions on the world community that are contrary to the political and economic interests of most countries. The political independent position of India, Bangladesh demonstrates to the global community the absolute priority should be firstly the national interests of the state and its own citizens not belonging to the so–called "Golden Billion".

A large number of the population of these two countries are below the poverty line and curtailment of the vital economic projects under the pressure of the "world hegemon" would inevitably lead to a sharp and even catastrophic decline in their level of economic activity and the population quality of life. On the example of the progressive and prospective strategic course of India and the People's Republic of Bangladesh it can be seen that the strategic actions and course of developing countries are driven by desire of achieving of the mutual benefit and equality. They are gained by the multilateral, economically and politically balanced steps aimed at building of a new and just world order.

The long–term cooperation of the RF, India and PRB in the field of nuclear energy periodically encountered the certain problems, misunderstandings and outside pressure. Despite these difficult moments it still demonstrates resistance to the external negative influence, retaining the possibility of continuing of active interaction in such an important area for humanity.

Case study

There is no particular doubt that at the moment (and in the foreseeable future) the RF and the State Corporation "Rosatom" which represents it in the nuclear sphere are the key players in the global industry market.

Moreover, our leadership is based not only by the factor of our own merits and achievements, but also by factor of the relative "weakness" of the key competitors (the USA, France, South Korea, Japan). They quite unreasonably reduce the share of nuclear energy in their energy balance under a pretext of "energy transition" and promotion of renewable energy. And only in the last months of 2021 and at the beginning of 2022 they admitted that it was simply impossible to solve the problem of the growing energy crisis without the atom. But a lot of things have already been lost and it is quite difficult to restore the forfeit potential and restart nuclear power plants that have been closed earlier.

Meanwhile, Rosatom continued to develop the innovative and prospective aspect of its activities and now the safe, efficient and breakthrough technologies and developments are used in the widest range of industries (tool engineering, IT, electrical engineering, iron and steel industry, oil and gas, shipbuilding and rocket and space industry etc.). Also are actively developing areas related to biofuels and low–carbon energy, projects of floating power plants and small modular reactors and so on. Hereby even a preliminary review of this Corporation's activity shows us that it has all chances to expand prospective areas of interaction including with the friendly South Asian partners [1].

Russia's cooperation with India and Bangladesh in the field of nuclear energy traditionally remains (and obviously will remain in the future) one of the key areas of their interaction. This process has been especially strengthened since the 2010s, in particular after the coming to power in the PRB in 2009 of the Awami League party, AL / "People's League" and its long–term leader Sheikh Hasina. For India the starting point for the activation of projects in the field of nuclear energy can be dated to the election victory in 2014 of the Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP / Indian People's Party and Narendra Modi. At the same time it should be noted that the interest in intensifying energy interaction between our countries is caused by both the objective and subjective factors.

Among the first points can be attributed quite obvious and significant mutual economic benefits received by the parties from this cooperation. In particular, this is the supply of various qualified Russian energy resources, industry technologies and competencies to these South Asian countries which are increasingly in need of them due to the rapidly growing population.

On the other hand, India can also offer its partners a rather serious list of the prospective areas in the nuclear industry. This is facilitated by the experience, competencies and technologies accumulated by the Indians during the implementation of their nuclear program which started in the 1950s. In particular, the country produces high–tech heavy water nuclear reactors outright thanks to its own technologies and is ready to export them

to the various countries of the world (in 2020, these were China, Great Britain, France, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and a number of others). In this context cooperation with the Russian Federation seems to be quite promising [2].

Besides this, India together with Russia is taking part in the most complex and responsible stage of assembling a cryostat for the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor which is being built in France. The country has a significant (9 %) contribution to the implementation of this global project aimed at making fusion energy available for the practical use and solving the problems of the energy crisis on Earth. The fact that India was chosen to carry out these works on the project witnesses the recognition of its authoritative role in the global nuclear energy. The Russian Federation and India have the opportunity to establish cooperation in this strategic aspect of the industry [2].

Significant potential and competencies accumulated as a part of the development of Indian alternative energy (solar, wind, biofuels and so on) can bring certain benefits to the RF where renewable energy continues to be not the main focus of business and government departments. At the same time, it cannot be denied that recently the situation in this area of the Russian energy industry has changed radically. However, it is necessary to mention here that for the RF having huge reserves of traditional fuel resources and developed areas of the energy industry, the issue of a quick transition to the renewable energy sources (RES) should not be so acute as for India and Bangladesh.

These countries are simply forced to use their capabilities and strengths of their simultaneous large reserves and development potential of RES because of the serious limitation of organic energy resources (oil, gas, coal, uranium and so on). They are striving for a faster “energy transition” and creating the so–called “carbon–free energy” which was announced at the end of the Paris climate conference in November 2015 [3].

If we talk about the subjective factors that led our countries to a sharp intensification of the bilateral cooperation in the energy sector we can name a very peculiar and even contested, but not less than significant aspect as “the role of the individual in history”. It is not an occasional coincidence that intensification of the transfer into practice of two key and strategic projects of joint sectoral cooperation between Russia, India and Bangladesh (NPP “Kudankulam”, Tamilnadu, South India, and “Rooppur”, Ishwardi, Northwestern Bangladesh) has occurred namely after the arrival of to power of Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina.

The fact that both of these leaders are friendly to Russia and its President Vladimir Putin, it seems to me, has played an important role in the development of these important projects. At the same time, the author

by no means underestimates the importance of such objective factors as the severe energy crisis in the countries of South Asia, the rapid growth of the local population, the need of energy resources for growing economies and their interest in efficient, reliable and modern nuclear power plants being built with the participation of "Rosatom".

For understanding of the importance of this factor it is enough to look at the amount of work (preparatory and practical) that was carried out in the context of these nuclear power plants before and after the coming to power of Prime Ministers Narendra Modi (2014) and Sheikh Hasina (2009). If we talk about the Indian project "Kudankulam", it was originally signed back in 1988. However, by 2014, the work was practically not carried out in the sufficient volume. In 1998 it was signed a final agreement to build the station; in 2002 it started the construction of power unit (PU); in 2004 it was built a small seaport next to the future station; only in 2013 PU № 1 was connected to the power grid and the full commissioning of the facility took place after BJP and Narendra Modi came to power. This is all success for 26 years [4].

Of course, in this context one can refer to a number of subjective and objective circumstances (the collapse of the USSR and the actual loss of economic contacts with India in the 1990s and early 2000s, the US political pressure, lack of technology and experience in working with light water reactors VVER–1000, mass protests in the country against Kudankulam NPP in 2011–2013 and a number of other points). The considerable amount of work was realized during the period when the current Prime Minister of India (Narendra Modi) was in power. To understand the fundamental changes in the project occurring during this time it is enough to list the most important practical results and achievements of the last eight years.

2014 — signing of an agreement on the construction of PU № 3 and № 4; 2015 — start of design work for the construction of these PU; 2016 — connection to the power grid and commissioning of PU № 2; 2017 — signing of an agreement on the construction of PU № 5 and № 6; 2019 — installation of a molten core catcher of PU № 3; 2021 — a similar installation on PU № 4 and so on. And these are just the key points and achievements in the process of implementing the project for the period 2014–2021 [4].

A similar situation (and even the most dynamic) has developed with regard to the implementation of the Bangladeshi project for the construction of the Rooppur NPP. The history of nuclear energy in Bangladesh is rather long–suffering and colored by the tragic events of the formation of independence in this country. Thus, proposals on the need to build a nuclear power plant in this area were made back in the 1960s by representatives of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission. That took place at a time when independent Bangladesh did not exist and this region was called East Pakistan [5].

The central government, representing West Pakistan, did not consider it necessary to invest heavily in a large–scale project in that part of the country, which was actually considered as a colony. In the late 1960s the Pakistani state found itself in a difficult, crisis situation, which ended in 1971 with an uprising and genocide of the people of East Pakistan. It was followed by the Bangladeshi War for independence, which ended (with the support of Indian troops) successfully for the latter. However, the country laid in ruins, and in such a situation even the thought of a possible construction of a NPP might seem mad [5].

Nevertheless, the first president of the PRB Mujibur Rahman (from 1972 to 1975) planned to develop the civilian nuclear energy after the restoration of the country from the devastating war of 1971. He understood the prospects and the need for promotion of this industry which could help to solve the acute problem of electricity shortages. In 1973, in order to achieve these goals as well as prepare for the future implementation of RNPP, the first president of the country signed a decree establishing the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission. For that time (taking into account the factor of colossal devastation and poverty observed in the first years of the independent PRB) this was a very far–sighted and non–standard step on the part of Mujibur Rahman. It caused misunderstanding and even rejection not only among a significant part of the local residents, but also among specialists and experts [6].

To carry out the practical implementation of the "Rooppur" project, the first president turned to a number of countries that had the necessary competencies (France, Canada, South Korea). But at the end only the USSR, the most friendly state at that time the country in relation to Bangladesh (along with India), expressed a prior consent to help with the construction of the station. The Soviet Union took an active part in supporting the independence and post–war reconstruction of the country, including contributing to the construction of a number of thermal power plants. Therefore one more benevolent step in favor of the PRB absolutely did not look unexpected [5].

And only in 2009, when Sheikh Hasina became the leader of Bangladesh for the second time, they really returned to the Rooppur project. The government of the PRB analyzed the capabilities of the leading nuclear powers of that time (Russia, the USA, France, Japan and a number of others). After that it was made an unambiguous decision that Rosatom and its competencies (as well as the "price-quality" ratio) are the most suitable option for Bangladesh [5].

Of course, not only economic preferences, but also Sheikh Hasina's geopolitical sympathies (oriented towards friendly ties with both India and Russia) played a role in choosing the contractor for the station construction. As a result after more than thirty years of neglect "Rooppur" project began

to be put into practice becoming a symbol of the rapid development of the PRB under the current Prime Minister as well as economic cooperation and friendship between the RF and the PRB.

The most significant stages of the project implementation include the following: 2011 — signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement between the Russian Federation and the NRB on the construction of RNPP; 2013 — laying the foundation stone for the construction of the future station; 2015 — signing of the General Contract for the construction of this NPP. Moreover, in this context it should be emphasized that from the Bangladeshi side the responsible organization became just BAEC which creation in 1973 was not entirely clear not only for ordinary residents of the PRB but even for many specialists and experts; 2017 — pouring the "first concrete" under the foundation of the future PU № 1; 2018 — a similar procedure for PU № 2; 2019 — concreting the foundation of the turbine island of PU № 1; 2021 — installation in the design position of the reactor vessel of PU № 1 and so on. And these are just the key moments and achievements of the project for the period 2011–2021 [6].

Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina have repeatedly emphasized that the joint nuclear projects with the RF (Kudankulam and Rooppur) have strategic importance for them. The success and the highest competitiveness of modern Russian nuclear technologies as well as the systematic and stable practical progress of these projects lead the leaders of these South Asian countries to an idea that nuclear cooperation should be continued after the completion of the current projects [7].

And in this context it is not surprising that for quite a long time the countries have been negotiating the construction of new nuclear power plants and power units in India and Bangladesh, the opportunity to exchange industry competencies and practical experience. Like any major technological project the construction of nuclear power plants has a significant multiplier effect solving a number of the most acute problems of the region such as overcoming the energy crisis, economic growth, raising the level of education of the population of South Asia and improving the quality of life of the multibillion population.

The cooperation between Russia and Bangladesh within the framework of the RNPP project (and since 2018 with the participation of India) provides the PRB with an excellent opportunity to improve the situation with the quality of education and training of its own highly qualified personnel and specialists not only in the field of construction and maintenance of such high–tech projects as nuclear power units. The entire process of creating a national nuclear industry (from the start of preparatory work to the moment of launching and operating a nuclear power plant) is a complex scientific and technological enterprise, and it is simply impossible to cope with industry problems and challenges

without the presence of trained and experienced specialists. Russian and Indian competencies, experience and technologies make possible to solve a difficult situation for the PRB related to the lack of highly qualified personnel [6].

Despite not so high PRB level of competence in the nuclear field, it should be noted that back in 1961 (when the region was part of Pakistan) it was established Bangladesh Institute of Atomic Agriculture; in 1973 — Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission; in 2013 — Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority. Naturally, they have a certain potential for development, research and achievements especially in the academic aspect of the industry [6].

Bangladeshi industry experts also highlight the factor of increasing the level of education and skills of the local society. Nuclear specialists are the intellectual elite of the state and in the case of the NRB it gets even more importance because of not solved the problems of poverty, unemployment and the lack of education of a certain part of society. It is increasing the number of qualified personnel receiving higher education in Russia and India for taking part in the implementation of the RNPP project. It is already being assessed as "the heritage of the country" in the local press [9].

Thus, a serious problem of NPP management and operation in the future is solving since all project participants are interested in operational safety. In accordance with the Tripartite Agreement — 2018, the RF and India participate in an educational project for training Bangladeshi specialists in their countries [10].

What advantages do Bangladeshi industry experts see from the implementation of the RNPP project? Oddly enough, the most important factor is a certain status of the project since it is part of a program to increase the authority and image of the country in the world. According to experts, joining the so–called "Atomic Club" (which includes a little more than 30 countries of the world) and the presence of its own "unique brand" named Rooppur will allow the state to become more recognizable on the world stage. RNPP is a real symbol of friendship between Russia and Bangladesh as well as Rosatom is one of the most important conductors of this process. The importance of Rooppur is becoming even more important for our states if we take into account that for a number of reasons trade turnover between our countries is limited (at the moment) and amounted to only 76 product categories and a little more than $600 million in the 2020–2021 financial year (for the PRB side) [11].

Among other advantages of the implementation of the station construction program are indicated such aspects as the radical and positive changes that have taken place in Rooppur itself and Ishwardi and the Pabna district on the whole. Of course, this would not have been possible without the investments made by Rosatom and the RF. Social tensions are reduced, the level of crime

and drug addiction is decreasing. More than 30 thousand citizens of the PRB and a number of local subcontractors are employed at the sites of the facility which objectively improves the living standards of the local population reducing the critical attitude to the construction of nuclear facilities on their territories [12].

However, the main thing is the possibility of reliable and long–term (up to 80 years) access of the population of the NRB to an ecological source of energy supply. In the context of a severe energy crisis this thing has a particular importance. Nuclear energy will allow the country to create a reliable and modern energy supply system, reduce dependence on imported energy raw materials and fuels and solve environmental problems by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

A separate and extremely promising aspect of Russian–Bangladesh cooperation (as well as Russian–Indian cooperation) in the field of civil nuclear energy is the possibility of promoting innovative areas in the form of the development of small modular reactors (SMRs), which use is now being actively developed by such industry powers as the Russia, the USA and China. This direction received a certain impetus after the UN Climate Conference in Glasgow, Scotland (October–November 2021).

Experts from the PRB believe that use of Russian developments in SMR could provide a very significant contribution to solving the energy problems of the country and the development of the country's nuclear industry. The obvious advantages of these reactors include the following points: 1) The possibility of their wide application since they do not require the withdrawal of large land for the construction, which given the lack of agricultural land in the PRB causes mass protests of the local population, most often not satisfied with small compensations for the loss of land; 2) The volume of investments and costs for SMRs is lower than for conventional nuclear power plants; 3) The possibility of participating in the construction of such reactors with the participation of private companies and organizations and so on. The RF and the PRB are significantly intensifying their bilateral dialogue in the framework of the possible implementation of similar promising projects at the territory of the PRB in the future [13].

And here it is necessary to note the healthy pragmatism of the state leaders Vladimir Putin and the government of Sheikh Hasina when bilateral relations take into account firstly national interests not the political calculations. We can cite an opposite example of our previously friendly state Finland which abandoned a mutually beneficial project in favor of the political situation (despite the complete lack of rationality of that decision).

Of course, there are a number of difficulties in the field of nuclear cooperation between the RF and SA, and this cannot be denied. Among the potential disadvantages and problems are named its high cost (more than 13 billion

dollars), even in the conditions of providing the most favorable lending conditions for the PRB government. Rooppur's opponents among the local opposition believe the project should be replaced with renewable energy program (seen as a safer and cheaper alternative). The population is intimidated by the possible negative consequences of the impact of radiation and radioactive waste on the environment of the region (including in relation to the unique local mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, water resources and climate), public health and so on. A possible radiation incident (according to critics) could be caused by an earthquake, typhoon or flood (like Fukushima), a terrorist and hacker attack and so forth [14].

Representatives of the Bangladesh National Committee for the Protection of Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Energy and Ports are particularly dissatisfied with the project. They are constantly trying to draw the attention of the local and world community with the above mentioned negative consequences of Sheikh Hasina's energy projects for the ecology and health of the PRB citizens. In this sense, the opposition of Bangladesh follows the path of Indian colleagues who organized mass demonstrations in the Indian state of Tamilnadu in 2011–2013 in the context of the KKNPP project [15].

However, all these fears are unfounded since VVER–1200 reactors of the new generation 3+ which currently under construction in Rooppur have an ultra–reliable protection system (active and passive, as well as a molten core catcher). They are able to bear a blow of an earthquake with a magnitude of up to 9 on the Richter scale as well as hit of an aircraft, missile or terrorist attack. It can be quite confidently asserted that a repetition of the tragedies of the Three Mile Island (1979), Chernobyl (1986) or Fukushima (2011) NPPs is impossible. The task of Rosatom in Bangladesh and India is to inform the local population as much as possible about the real advantages and imaginary lacks of nuclear energy [7].

Atomic Energy Information Centre has been set up in Ishwardi (a city adjacent to the RNPP site). Among the key tasks of this Centre is to neutralize the criticism of Rooppur from local activists, environmentalists and political opposition to the current government of Sheikh Hasina. A large program is being implemented: lectures, seminars, open discussions, competitions explaining and informing the PRB citizens (including the local residents of Ishwardi and Pabna) about the advantages of nuclear energy [16].

Due to the activity of the Centre the following conspicuous facts became known to the Bangladeshi public (information for September 2021): 1) Electricity generation at Rooppur will provide 1,8 million families in the country with electricity; 2) 2,5 thousand qualified local specialists will be able to apply and improve their skills in the process of project implementation; 3) About 50 thousand Bangladeshi families are directly or indirectly involved in the construction of the station; 4) Nearly

1,500 Bangladeshi citizens will be trained in Russia and the PRB itself and after the completion of the training process they will be sent to the project site to ensure proper operation and maintenance of the plant; 5) The Russian government annually provides special scholarships to several dozen Bangladeshi students for getting a higher education in the field of nuclear engineering at the main Russian nuclear university (NRNU MEPhI, Moscow) and so on [16].

In its turn, such facts as corruption (sadly, a typical phenomenon for the countries of South Asia) and the inability of Bangladeshis to independently and on time carry out a number of necessary works within the framework of the project (in particular, the construction of infrastructure for power transmission lines / power lines for energy transmission, which will be produced by RNPP) [17].

Conclusion

The geopolitical realities of the "post–February 24, 2022 world" orientate the RF towards a greater intensification of cooperation (including energy) with South Asia. The rapid refocusing of the Russian economy and energy resources to the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America (which in the very near future should take a completely different place in world geopolitics) also depends on the successful implementation of existing projects in India and Bangladesh. The world must understand that in the person of the Russian Federation it has a reliable partner that has practically unlimited opportunities for the supply of oil, gas, coal and other energy resources and fulfills all its obligations to partners.

Ultimately this should allow the Russian energy industry to maintain its level of development and neutralize the damage from the loss of the European and North American markets. It can be reached through the development of the markets of those countries that previously absolutely did not appear in the list of importers of Russian energy products, services and raw materials.

On the other hand, the Indian, Bangladeshi and other South Asian economies are getting a unique opportunity to receive cheap energy resources from the RF, thus maintaining high rates of development of their industry, agriculture and so forth. Maintaining neutrality by the key countries of the subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) during the current uncompromising conflict between Russia and the West has once again demonstrated the desire of the parties to form a just, truly democratic and multipolar world. This is a world order where energy resources and industry technologies are not an instrument of confrontation and mutual accusations of "blackmail" and "energy wars", but a means of mutually beneficial pooling of efforts and exchange, taking into account the interests and opinions of all participants.

Another most important consequence of the global split of the world and the fact that the Russian Federation and the key countries of South Asia are in the "one boat" (which is one of the symbols of the policy of Sheikh Hasina and Bangladesh itself) that those transport and infrastructure corridors which were so much talked about before ("North–South" / "St. Petersburg — Mumbai", "Russia — Central Asia — Afghanistan — Pakistan", "Northern Sea Route (NSR) — Vladivostok" and "Sakhalin — India" and others) are gaining their reality right now in conditions of the new world that is taking shape here and now.

Taking into account that Russian energy resources and industry technologies are one of the most important areas of mutual cooperation, the intensification of their movement along the above transport corridors provides fundamentally new and truly breakthrough opportunities for the parties. This also applies to a serious increase in the mutual levels of trade, which until recently left much to be desired. However, events taking place since 2019 (Asia–Pacific Cooperation / APEC Summit in Vladivostok) and even more so after the start of the Russian military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, inspires hope that the situation in this aspect will change radically for the better.

In addition, the following areas may become promising aspects of the mutually beneficial cooperation: 1) Expansion of existing and search for new sites for the implementation of joint industry projects; 2) Encouragement of foreign direct investment in the industry; 3) Mutual promotion of prospective thorium energy; 4) India's interest in the Russian program for the construction of floating nuclear power plants and the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and the Arctic; 5) Cooperation in the field of nuclear cyber security; 6) The RF support of the Indian full entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and so on [18].

The RF and the key SA countries are indeed in the same boat now. Tries to balance between the two key opposing centers of power is counterproductive. Only a multipolar world can give both Russia and India the opportunities they truly deserve. The importance of "small countries" should also increase. The unipolar world (if it persists), most likely, will not even recognize the status of a "regional power" for India and will try to reduce Russia to the "extremely small values".

Our states have only one choice to achieve a new and just world since there is a real danger of "sinking" within the old world of one hegemon, dictate and decision–making center. And the fact that our countries have accumulated a rich and favorable experience of the mutually beneficial cooperation in such a key and strategic industry as nuclear energy gives reason to hope that the Russian Federation and South Asia will be able to solve the economic difficulties associated with sanctions and solve political problems facing our countries.

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