



The Indo-Bangladesh Relations in Present Era

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ABSTRACT

India and Bangladesh are interrelated in geopolitical relations but their core objectives are different. While geopolitical compulsions introduce the never-ending challenges of proximity to the two parties, including crucial issues of security, migration and resource sharing, Bangladesh is yet to form its own identity in which the perceived image of India figures predominantly, and the attitudes and expectations they develop towards each other shape the pattern of bilateral interactions between the two countries. Solutions to a number of vexed problems remain elusive and irritants in relations outnumber gestures of goodwill. While the warmth in relations has frequently fluctuated with the change of regimes, a sustained pattern of uneasiness and mistrust persists. Analysed at three levels of geopolitics, attitudinal effects and functional exchanges, India–Bangladesh relations appear as a reflection of normal big country–small country power relations where policies are formulated on the basis of the primary principle of self-help but are further shaded by the quest for transforming itself into a nation-state by Bangladesh.

Keywords: India, Bangladesh, geopolitics, border security, migration, Bangladeshi identity.

Research Methodology:

The understudy paper requires the utilization of chronicled and systematic techniques. The authentic procedure has been utilized to feature the chronicled foundation of the issue and after that top to bottom investigation has been made to determine the fundamental contention of the paper. The paper has utilized both critical and in addition secondary information. The essential sources incorporate strategy archives, outside issue records and other significant essential sources. The secondary sources which have been utilized as a part of the paper constitute of books, papers and other important optional material. Actually the information has been utilized from the two sources and thus an endeavour has been made to reach the sensible conclusion.

Introduction:

India was the first country to recognize Bangladesh as a separate and independent state and established diplomatic relations with the country immediately after its independence in December 1971. The relationship between India and Bangladesh is anchored in history, culture, language and



shared values of secularism, democracy, and countless other commonalities between the two countries. It is based on sovereignty, equality, trust, understanding and win-win partnership that goes far beyond a strategic partnership. In the last couple of years, the relationship has been further strengthened including through cooperation in new and high-technology areas. There have been regular high-level visits and exchanges between the two countries. There have also been frequent visits at Ministerial level as well as between senior officials on a regular basis. Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina paid a State Visit to India from 07-10 April 2017. During the visit, 36 bilateral documents were concluded in various areas including in high technology areas of Civil Nuclear Energy, Space, Information Technology, Defence, Capacity building etc. A 3rd Line Of Credit (LOC) worth US\$ 4.5 billion was also extended to Bangladesh. The two Prime Ministers presided over a commemorative ceremony in honour of Indian martyrs of Liberation War of Bangladesh. Prior to this visit, PM Hasina had visited India on 16-17 October 2016 to participate in the BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a State visit to Bangladesh on 6-7 June, 2015. During the visit, 22 bilateral documents were concluded, including the exchange of instrument of ratification for India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) and a 2nd Line of Credit (LOC) worth US\$ 2 billion. After assuming charge, External Affairs Minister of India Smt Sushma Swaraj and Minister of State for External Affairs Lt. Gen (Retd) V.K. Singh had paid their first standalone overseas visits to Bangladesh on 25-27 June and 24 August 2014 respectively. Former President Pranab Mukherjee visited Bangladesh in March 2013, which was his first trip abroad since assuming office. President of Bangladesh, Mr. Md. Abdul Hamid visited India in December 2014, which was the first visit by Bangladesh's 'ceremonial Head of State' after a gap of 42 years.

Security & Border Management:

India and Bangladesh share 4096.7 km. of border, which is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours. The India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) came into force following the exchange of instruments of ratification in June 2015. On July 31, 2015 the enclaves of India and Bangladesh in each other's countries were exchanged and strip maps were signed. Residents of these erstwhile enclaves, who opted to retain their Indian citizenship made a final movement to India by November 30, 2015. A number of agreements related to security cooperation have been signed between both the countries. The Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) signed in 2011 aims to synergize the efforts of both the Border Guarding Forces for checking cross border illegal activities and crimes as well as for maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the India-Bangladesh



border. The settlement of the maritime boundary arbitration between India and Bangladesh, as per UNCLOS award of July 7, 2014, has paved the way for the economic development of this part of the Bay of Bengal.

India's Economic Assistance to Bangladesh:

India has extended 3 Lines of Credits to Bangladesh in the last 7 years amounting to US\$ 8 billion. This makes Bangladesh the largest recipient of LOC funds from India till date. During the visit of Bangladesh PM to India in January 2010, India had announced a US\$1 billion Line of Credit (LOC) for Bangladesh covering projects in public transportation, roads, railways, bridges and inland waterways etc. Most of these projects have been completed and the remaining area various stages of completion. India had extended the second LOC of US\$ 2 billion during the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Bangladesh in June 2015. This LOC covers 15 projects in areas of Roads, Railways, Power, Shipping, SEZs, Health & Medical Care and Technical Education. During the visit of Bangladesh PM to India in April 2017, India extended a third LOC of US\$ 4.5 billion to Bangladesh. The new LOC will cover projects in areas of Port Construction, Railways, Roads, Airports, Power & Energy, Telecommunications, and Shipping etc.

In addition to LOC funds, Government of India also provides grant assistance to Bangladesh for projects under 'Aid to Bangladesh'. Projects such as construction of school/college buildings, laboratories, dispensaries, deep tube wells, community centres, renovation of historical monuments/buildings etc. have been financed by Government of India under this programme. At present, three Sustainable Development Projects (SDPs) are being undertaken in the cities of Rajshahi, Khulna and Sylhet. The extended development work of Rabindra Nath Tagore's ancestral house in Shilaidaha is as well as 36 community clinics in selected districts of Bangladesh is also being undertaken. One of the biggest projects under the Indian grant assistance is the Bangladesh section of the Agartala-Akhaura rail-link.

Power and Energy Sector Cooperation:

Cooperation in power sector has become one of the hallmarks of India Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh is currently importing about 660 MW of power from India. In March 2016, the two Prime Ministers inaugurated the export of power from Tripura to Bangladesh as well as export of Internet bandwidth to Tripura from Bangladesh. Supply of another 500 MW is expected to begin in 2018. The 1320 MW coal-fired Maitree thermal power plant, a 50:50 JV between National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) of India and Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), is being developed at Rampal. During Bangladesh PM's visit in April 2017, agreements for generation/ supply/ financing



of more than 3600 MW electricity were signed between Indian public /private companies and Bangladesh side. Energy sector cooperation between India and Bangladesh has also seen considerable progress in the last two years. Many Indian public sector units such as Indian Oil Corporation, Numaligarh Refinery Limited, Petronet LNG Ltd are working with their Bangladeshi counterparts in the oil and gas sector of Bangladesh. India has agreed to fund the construction of India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline from Siliguri to Parbatipur for supply of Diesel to Bangladesh from Numaligarh Refinery Limited. ONGC Videsh Ltd has acquired two shallow water blocks in consortium with Oil India Limited and is currently exploring this blocks. The possibility of gas grid interconnectivity for the mutual benefit of the two countries is also being explored.

Emphasizing the need to increase Indian investments, PM Modi welcomed Bangladesh's decision to allocate land for SEZs for India. Mongla and Bheramara were identified as the possible locations. He lauded Bangladeshi PM Sheikh Hasina's effort in improving the power situation in Bangladesh and her government's untiring effort in meeting the challenges of power-shortage and facilitate its economic empowerment towards a developed Middle Income Country (MIC) by achieving an installed capacity of 24,000 MW by 2021. PM Modi also indicated that India can be an earnest partner in achieving this goal and many Indian corporate have the capacity to contribute in this endeavour. The Government of Bangladesh inked a Memorandum of Understanding with two leading private Indian firms. The Indian Prime Minister also reiterated an earlier commitment that India would not take any unilateral decisions on the Himalayan component of their River inter linking projects which may affect Bangladesh adversely

Connectivity:

India-Bangladesh is a good example of connectivity through all modes of transport. The movement of goods by road is operationalised through 36 functional Land Customs Stations (LCSs) and 2 Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) along the border. This includes the Petrapole-Benapole ICP through which more than 50% of the bilateral trade takes place on account of which it has been decided to operate these land ports on 24x7 basis since 01 August, 2017.

The Protocol on Inland Water Trade and Transit (PIWTT) has been operational since 1972. It permits movement of goods over barges/vessels from India through the river systems of Bangladesh on eight specific routes. Trans-shipment of goods to Northeastern States of India through Ashuganj river port and further through Akhaura- Agartala by road commenced in June 2016 under the PIWTT. Coastal Shipping Agreement signed during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh in June 2015 has also enabled direct sea movement of containerized/bulk/dry cargo between the two



countries. In February 2017, containership services have started between Kolkata and Pangaon (which is just around 20 km from Dhaka) under this framework.

Out of the erstwhile 6 rail links that existed, four Broad Gauge inter-country rail links between the two countries are operational now. The Radhikapur-Birol rail link was the latest to be put back in operation during PM Sheikh Hasina's visit in April 2017. Apart from these, work on the remaining two new rail links is ongoing. The 7th new rail-link between Agartala and Akhaura is being financed under grant assistance of India. The 'Maitree Express' between Kolkata and Dhaka now operates 4 days a week and has been converted into a fully AC train service. The trial run of the 2nd Maitri Express between Khulna-Kolkata was conducted during PM Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in April 2017 and will be operational soon. There are regular bus services between Kolkata-Dhaka, Shillong-Dhaka and Agartala-Kolkata via Dhaka. A new bus service (Dhaka-Khulna-Kolkata) was launched during PM Sheikh Hasina's visit in April 2017. The Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal – Motor Vehicle Agreement (BBINMVA) is expected to significantly boost connectivity by road. The trial run of Cargo Movement on Trucks from Kolkata to Agartala via Dhaka and Dhaka to New Delhi via Kolkata and Lucknow was conducted in August 2016. There are presently around 100 flights operating weekly between India and Bangladesh connecting various Indian cities like New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai to Dhaka and Chittagong. From Bangladesh, US-Bangla Airlines, NOVOAIR, Regent Airways and Biman Bangladesh; and from India, Jet Airways, Spice Jet and Air India are operating flights between India and Bangladesh.

Conclusion:

The above narrative of the key issues involved and the fast-track forward movement attained thus far clearly signify the evolution of a new reality of genuine cooperative environment for all-round economic engagement between India and Bangladesh. The symbiotic positivity to grow harmoniously stems primarily from the signing of the historic Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) that was inked in Dhaka on May 7, 2015 with significant socio-economic implications for a class of people whose destiny had been facing uncertainties for decades. With the recently signed twenty two important bilateral documents including four agreements, three protocols, fourteen Memorandum of Understanding and one letter of consent which together covers varied areas of cooperation, economics, trade and investment, security, infrastructure developments and education, India and Bangladesh are on the way of evolving a new paradigm for growing together harmoniously that could well become the model for other countries to follow. Sub-regional cooperation among BBIN would not have been possible without establishment of strong, cooperative Bangladesh-India relations. Suffice it would be to say



that these efforts could well decide the destiny of the two nations and indeed the region. While complimenting the visionary leaderships of the two countries, one would like to re-stress that the momentum needs to be maintained and further energized for the well being of our people.

More prominent local collaboration, particularly in the field of financial improvement to destroy the neediness trap, might be a definitive objective of every single South Asian. Be that as it may, unless some remedial and brilliant measures are embraced right now, the circumstance may move the other way. That would be amazingly unsettling for the large number of destitution stricken South Asians. They may need to go past the geopolitical impulses and move towards more concrete provincial collaboration like what the Europeans and Southeast Asians are doing. Something else, improvement as such will just evade the South Asians. Lastly, the MOU emphasized the significance of people to people contact in carrying the relationship forward, not only the two bus services were flagged off and more bus and train services were agreed upon, India and Bangladesh also announced the opening of new consulates in Sylhet and Khulna for India and in Guwahati for Bangladesh. Similarly since the Dhaka Kolkata Mitree Express is currently very popular and India has also agreed to construct a modern international passenger terminal to mitigate the grievances.

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