



India - Bangladesh Partnership Prospects: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

India-Bangladesh relations are improving, increasing bilateral trade between the two countries. However, India's ' economic power has skewed trade in favor of Bangladesh, resulting in a trade deficit. The Narendra Modi government is expected to address these issues and improve relations. The paper explores the future direction of India-Bangladesh relations by considering geopolitical trends, historical traditions and general issues. India-Bangladesh relations have grown steadily, especially since Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took power in 2009. Despite India's "Neighborhood First" and "Act East" policies, there is some pessimism about the future. This article examines the historical evolution of the relationship, the significance of Bangladesh to India and the issues that threaten its future. This suggests that the relationship is essential for both countries and should be strengthened through immediate resolution. Key Words: "Neighborhood First, Act East" policies, bilateral trade, Threaten Issues; geopolitical trends , historical evolution .

Index Terms -"Neighborhood First, Act East" policies, bilateral trade, Threaten Issues; Geopolitical Trends , historical evolution.

INTRODUCTION

India and Bangladesh have many things in common, including a shared history, language, and culture. An all-encompassing partnership built on sovereignty, equality, trust, and understanding reflects the exceptional nature of bilateral ties. As a model for bilateral ties, this alliance has grown throughout the region and beyond. Bangladesh was created in 1971 after the breakup of Pakistan. India played an important role in its initiation, helping to care for one crore refugees and arming and training the fighters of the Mukti Bahini. Bangladesh was recognized by India on 6 December 1971 and an agreement was signed with the Acting President on 10 December 1971 establishing a joint command, civil service, repatriation of refugees and restoration of normalcy. After the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in January 1972, a second agreement was formed which provided goods and services worth 25 crores for the reconstruction of Bangladesh. India's role in Bangladesh's liberation war is well documented with the signing of the Indo-Bangladesh Alliance, Cooperation and Peace Treaty in 1971. However, the assassination of Mujibur Rahman in 1975 irrevocably broke the special relationship between the two states. As Bangladesh achieved stability, its foreign policy became more outward-looking, and political instability and Bangladesh's efforts to gain more strategic autonomy led to limited engagement. New Delhi's political proximity to Mujibur Rahman became a liability for the future of bilateral relations. India and Bangladesh have a longstanding relationship founded on equality, sovereignty, mutual respect and understanding. With Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina taking over in January 2024 and Prime Minister Modi restoring people-centric cooperation, bilateral exchanges intensified in the first half of 2024. In February 2024, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh. Hasan Mahmud went to India to meet. Draupadi Murmu will conduct bilateral talks with the Prime Minister. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

attended the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and attended the Munich Security Conclave in May 2024. Both the Prime Ministers attended the Voice of Global South Summit in 2023 and formally opened the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline. Both the Prime Ministers attended the 6th Indian Ocean Summit and Bangladesh was invited to participate in India's G20 Presidency in 2023.

Objectives of the Study

This study uses scholarly views and writings to analyze India-Bangladesh relations, examining historical evaluations, diverse perspectives, Bangladesh's importance to India, and potential issues. The research aims to resolve these issues and foster stronger relationships between the two countries, with policymakers addressing these issues.

Research question

1. What are the historical ties between India and Bangladesh
2. What are the main concerns in the bilateral strategic relationships between Bangladesh and India?

Research methodology

1. Research Design Study will be based on explanatory research design. This study will help find causal relationships between explanatory research design concepts. This paper adopts the document and analytical method. 2. The nature of qualitative Data . The primary data will be collected from the Ministry of Finance and secondary data will be collected from books, magazines, scholarship journals, policy reports and government reports. The Indian Foreign Ministry will collect primary and secondary data through the Defense Ministry, while resources like books and reports will be used by the Bangladesh government website.

Historical Evolution of Bangladesh-India Relations

India-Bangladesh relations have been a long-standing relationship since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. The relationship can be divided into three phases: 1971–1975 Honeymoon period, Bangladesh's first civilian government under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman maintained deep friendship and cooperation with India, which was characterized as the 'honeymoon' period. Between 1972 and 1975, India agreed to withdraw military troops in response to Sheikh Mujib's request and signed an agreement called the 'Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace'. The second phase began in 1975 with the overthrow of the Mujib regime in a brutal military coup. The post-Sheikh Mujib era began with the rise of General Ziaur Rahman, who adopted the same policy of maintaining relations with India. The third phase began with the overthrow of military dictator General Ershad in December 1990 and the revival of democracy. However, there was no improvement in the relationship between India and Bangladesh during this period. However, relations improved dramatically after the Awami League returned to power under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina in 1996, leading to the signing of the Ganga Water Sharing Agreement. From 1976 to 1995, Bangladesh and India faced various challenges as the anti-Mujib bloc governments adopted foreign policies against Mujib's policies, leaning towards Pakistan and increasing India's military capabilities. However, relations improved with the signing of agreements on the Farakka Barrage, the Teesta Water Treaty, the Three Bigha Corridor and the SAARC Summit. Sheikh Hasina's 2010 visit to India marked an important milestone in bilateral relations, signing five agreements, including legal assistance, transfer of convicted prisoners and cooperation in the power sector. The agreement resulted in positive outcomes such as a ceasefire, rail and road facilities, and ports for cargo transportation. India reduced the list of embargoes related to Bangladesh and strengthened bilateral relations by giving the country Rs 4500 crore . Currently, relations between India and Bangladesh are improving with positive steps taken by both countries like joint action against terrorism, resumption of Kolkata-Dhaka bus service and agreeing to a free trade agreement.

India-Bangladesh Relations' Recent Developments

Defense-Cooperation

Bangladesh and India have a long history of military, economic and geo-strategic ties. They work closely on anti-corruption projects, police affairs and the fight against human trafficking, illegal drug trafficking, and counterfeit currency. To maintain the security of the 4,096 km international border, cooperative border demarcation, joint border pillar inspections and border fencing have been deployed. 2023-2024 saw important bilateral defense-related interactions, including the visit of Indian Air Chief Marshal Vivek Ram Chowdhury to Bangladesh Air Force and visit to Dhaka. Nevertheless, there are concerns about China's significant arms transfers to Bangladesh.

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Challenges with security Bangladesh and India

To predict future relations, it is essential to analyze the issues that currently exist between the two nations. Water distribution is the most important of the five contested problems, which also include smuggling, illegal citizenship, enclave disputes, Chakma refugee difficulties, and water distribution.

Water distribution Disputes

Bangladesh shares 54 identical rivers with India, notably the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Teesta (GBT). Changes in the GBT flow from India in the upstream course have significantly affected downstream Bangladesh. India has been diverting water from the Ganges since 1975 by building a barrage at Farakka and a barrage at Gajoldoba, India. This has adversely affected Bangladesh by depriving it of its water, leading to water disputes between the two countries. Since the construction of the Farakka Dam on the Ganga, the dispute between Bangladesh and India over the sharing of water in the river, especially the Ganga, has become a major issue. The agreement, signed in 1975 and renegotiated in 1977, stipulated that Bangladesh would receive 62.5% of the water during the low-flow season, while India would receive 37.5%. However, the deal was met with opposition from Bangladesh, who believed it was a blow to India's interests. The agreement was based on the belief that at least 40,000 cusecs of water was needed to save Calcutta port, but India had no choice. Despite the treaty's provisions, India finally abrogated it in 1982 and the revised treaty remained in force until 1988. India and Bangladesh have been facing water disputes since the formation of new governments in 1996. India proposed the GangaBrahmaputra Link Canal, which the World Bank approved. Bangladesh has argued that this would waste a large portion of its land, but the plan actually uses 238,500 acres of land in India and 20,000 acres in Bangladesh, just 2% of the irrigated land. The plan increased the flow of the Ganges by 25000 to 30000 cusecs, but this was sufficient to meet the requirements of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In 1996, both countries signed a '12 Point 30-Year Agreement', which allowed India to supply at least 90% of water to Bangladesh based on data from 1949 to 1988. However, many experts believe that the agreement is based on false information and that water availability has declined since 1988. Bangladesh realized the Farakka Barrage dispute in 1975 when India started work. The Teesta barrage dispute is further complicated by India's withdrawal of water from the Ghazaldoba river, which reduces water flow during the dry season. In 2013, both countries agreed to provide Bangladesh with Teesta water benefits, but the agreement was not implemented due to a lack of consultation from the central government. However, with the change of government in India in 2015, the Prime Ministers of both countries agreed to a rational water sharing agreement, which washed away Bangladesh's mistrust of India.

Dispute on Enclaves

Bangladesh and India have been in dispute over the enclave since 1974; In 1992, the Indian government gave Diagram and Angarpota to Bangladesh. The matter was postponed due to the appeals of the Supreme Court and Calcutta High Court. The Joint Panel could not convene in 2005 despite an agreement on a joint census and survey. But in 2015, the problem was remedied when 14,000 people from 51 Bangladeshi enclaves and about 37,000 people from 111 Indian enclaves were granted citizenship. Bangladesh occupied Navi Mur Island conflict started. Despite the fact that India currently controls the area, a comprehensive solution requires a collaborative survey. Bangladesh's foreign policy is very important to India, as it shares most of its border with the country. India aims to become a regional hegemon and needs Bangladesh's support for that. Since 2008, bilateral relations have improved with the resolution of the maritime boundary dispute in 2014 and the implementation of the land boundary agreement in 2015. India has signed a memorandum of understanding for the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports, making Bangladesh an important partner. India's Strategic Account.

Problem of Chakma Refugees

The return of Chakma refugees to the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh is still a point of contention between the two countries. Although Bangladesh has agreed to accept the refugees, it has refused to provide accommodation due to lack of suitable accommodation. There are issues of human rights, asylum, peacekeeping and refugee security. HD. Deugowda's visit in 1997 brought up the issue, but neither side could reach a compromise.

Issue of smuggling

The trade deficit has traditionally favored Bangladesh due to the economic disparity between the two countries. As a result, smuggling is encouraged instead of normal trade. Both countries need to work together to find a solution to this important issue. Bangladesh promoted luxury goods such as Japanese cameras and tape recorders to meet the needs of the Indian population for food, edible oil, spices and other essentials. This is worrying for both countries as smuggling is actively encouraged between them rather than trade.

Problem of Illegal Citizens

The problem of illegal immigrants entering India from Bangladesh has grown to be a major point of contention. Prior to 1971, all illegal Bangladeshi citizens were granted Indian citizenship. But in 1980, the Assam Gan Parishad's opposition caused the issue to worsen. The BJP's growing power has increased India's sensitivity to this problem. In 1984, India fenced the 4095-kilometer border and sent illegal citizens back to Bangladesh as part of a two-pronged operation. However, issues like 'contrary occupation', river centers, and hazy border lines present difficulties for this strategy. To tackle this problem, both nations must take a sensible and considerate stance. Human rights violations and India's "shoot to kill" policy have made the Bangladesh-India border a "killing border" since 2000. Between 2000 and 2020, 1230 Bangladeshis were killed near the border. It damaged India's long-standing relationship with India. Bangladesh and raised public and government doubts. The Government of India should have come up with a successful plan to reduce the killings and mend the fence.

Conclusion

Bangladesh and India initially developed close relations and India played an important role in the independence of Bangladesh. However, after a 25-year friendship and cooperation agreement was signed, disputes arose between the parties. These issues have been exacerbated by the South Asia policies of China and Pakistan, the political situation in Bangladesh, and the involvement of the United States. Today, the end of the Cold War, the formation of a democratic government in Bangladesh, the growth of regional cooperation, the participation of SAARC and the expansion of cooperation in the Asia Pacific region are all indications of positive relations. Both countries could benefit from a more thorough understanding of regional and international peace. Bangladesh, India's vital ally, faces contentious issues that threaten security

and Indo-Bangladesh relations. China's access to the Indian Ocean depends on its geo-strategic position. India must be a key player in solving these problems by guaranteeing reliability through commitment, support, solidarity and migration issues. The Teesta River conflict has been a significant issue since the independence of Bangladesh. A quick resolution of the conflict is challenging due to political issues in both countries, especially in West Bengal. Bangladesh, India's reliable South Asian partner, is an important strategic ally and an important partner in India's journey to become a regional power. The country shares most of its borders with India and has the potential to become South Asia's economic center of gravity due to its strategic location as the gateway to the Bay of Bengal. However, the contentious issues and new issues concern the future of Indo-Bangladesh relations, increasing mistrust and posing security threats to India. As a regional economic and military power, India has to play a leading role in resolving all controversial issues in Bangladesh and South Asia. Indian political elite and media should understand the critical nature of Bangladesh and refrain from spreading harmful news. Reliability does not require long-term relationships but does require keeping promises, providing support in difficult times, showing solidarity and working together to address immigration challenges.

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