

REPRESENTATION OF INDIA AND BANGLADESH RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT:

Bangladesh was declared independent in December 1971 and India accepted it as an independent state. Consequently, these two countries quickly established a diplomatic connection between them. There are many similarities between India and Bangladesh, including their shared history, languages, and cultures. The strong bilateral ties are a reflection of a comprehensive partnership that goes far beyond a strategic alliance and is founded on sovereignty, equality, trust, and understanding. The relationship has grown stronger, developed, and evolved into a blueprint for bilateral ties for the area and beyond. Through collaboration in innovative and high-tech fields, the partnership has been further reinforced over the past couple of years.

KEYWORD: independent, democracy, relations, political, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION:

The establishment of Bangladesh can be attributed to two instances of violent division. The first one took place in 1947 as a result of the partition of Bengal. In this context, the region primarily inhabited by Hindus in the western part of India was designated as the Indian state of West Bengal, while the region predominantly populated by Muslims in the eastern part of India was designated as East Pakistan, which subsequently became Bangladesh. The secession of East Pakistan, which eventually became Bangladesh, in 1971 was a consequence of the Pakistani state's turned down to acquiesce to the demands put forth by the elites.

The final outcome yielded a nation that exhibited a significant degree of homogeneity in terms of both language and religion, distinguishing it from the other prominent countries within the subcontinent. However, Bangladesh continues to be marked by internal strife and discord regarding the core tenets of its national identity, resulting in the inability to establish a robust governance structure and cultivate a unified citizenry. There is a scarcity of empirical evidence indicating a substantial enhancement in the overall condition of political stability. In essence, the current political disputes that revolve around nationalism have replaced the preceding ones. The establishment of the Muslim Bengali state was the outcome of a sequence of recurring divisions. It is important to acknowledge that before to 1947, no significant political entity had anticipated the development of this nation. Conversely, the origins of these divisions were centred on clashes between established elites and individuals aspiring for social advancement, as they endeavoured to address issues of resource allocation by using patron-client networks.

On December 6, 1971, India and Bhutan were among the first countries to recognize Bangladesh as a sovereign state. It is also worth noting that India and Bangladesh share the world's longest border, which is 4,096.7 km long and ranks sixth in the world. Furthermore, due to a shared historical legacy and geographical closeness, India and Bangladesh have very close socio-cultural, linguistic, and economic ties. Despite these similarities, India-Bangladesh bilateral relations have seen numerous ups and downs over the last 50 years, as they have navigated the ebb and flow of politics in the eastern region of South Asia. The assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's Father of the Nation, in 1975 dealt a heavy blow not only to Dhaka but also to New Delhi.

India Bangladesh relations are also known as Indo-Bangladeshi ties or Bangladeshi-Indian relations and are linked through two-way relations between Indian and Bangladeshi nationals. The bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh has emerged as an important factor in determining regional dynamics and boosting South Asian cooperation. The ties between these neighboring countries are extremely important, not only because of their historical and cultural affinities, but also because of their shared geopolitical, economic, and security interests.

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bangladesh Liberation War took place in the year 2021. The year also commemorated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh, a neighbouring country with a significant level of proximity and interaction. During the period when the inhabitants of East Pakistan (now known as Bangladesh) were engaged in armed conflict against the Pakistan Army in pursuit of their self-determination and the establishment of a new sovereign state, India provided support and assistance to their cause. India's endorsement of Bangladesh's quest for independence was not solely limited to official channels, but also extended to interpersonal connections. Consequently, the commencement of the mass exodus of millions of refugees seeking asylum in India from the genocide occurring in East Pakistan evoked memories among the populace of India at large, and specifically in the regions of West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, reminiscent of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The host communities in the three bordering states of India readily embraced the East Pakistani refugees and openly voiced their unwavering endorsement of the autonomy of the Bengalis residing in Pakistan.

The bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh have experienced a notable decline due to various factors, including alterations in Bangladesh's political system, allegations of neglect by India towards Bangladesh, India's increasing focus on its Western and Northern neighbours, polarisation in political and public sentiments within Bangladesh regarding relations with India, a partially unfavourable perception of India's approaches within Bangladesh, and dissatisfaction expressed by both countries.

The political landscape in Bangladesh has undergone substantial transformations since 2009 due to shifts in leadership and the implementation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Vision 2021. This vision aims to commemorate the golden jubilee of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and has garnered attention from influential figures in both India and Bangladesh. These figures recognise the importance of addressing contentious bilateral issues in a fair and balanced manner. These recent events have imbued the previously strained bilateral relations between the two nations with significance, thereby restoring the trajectory of the relations.

Establishing a comprehensive framework of collaboration is of utmost significance for fostering development between the two nations in various shared domains such as water resources, electricity, transportation and communication, tourism, and education. The recent simultaneous commemoration of Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birthday by India and Bangladesh has shown the significance of their emotional and cultural ties in fostering a durable bilateral friendship.

Prior to the attainment of independence by India, the states of the two nations had existed as a unified entity. The historical unity between the two neighbouring nations, characterised by their distinct physical sizes and varying geopolitical power, has played a significant role in shaping a robust cultural bond. However, it has also posed challenges to their diplomatic relations. The 50th Vijay Diwas festivities in Bangladesh saw the presence of Sh. Ram Nath Kovind, the former President of India, who visited the country from December 15 to December 17, 2021. This visit was extended as an invitation from H.E. Mr. Abdul Hamid, the President of Bangladesh.

This marked his inaugural international journey subsequent to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and he had not before visited Bangladesh. The individual paid homage to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the deceased troops of the Liberation War by visiting the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar and the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum.

The Victory Day parade in Dhaka on December 16, 2021, was graced by the presence of the Indian President, who attended the event as an esteemed guest. The Indian Armed Forces actively took part in this significant event as a gesture of acknowledgment for the courage and selfless acts of sacrifice demonstrated by their personnel during the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh. Subsequently, within the confines of the Bangladesh Parliament, the President delivered a speech during a commemorative event held in recognition of Bangladesh's Golden Jubilee of Independence. The Sree Ramna Kali Mandir located in Dhaka, Bangladesh, underwent destruction at the hands of the Pakistani army in March 1971. However, it was recently reinstated and ceremoniously reopened on December 17 under the auspices of the President. Prior to delivering a speech to a diverse audience consisting of individuals from India and Bangladesh, who shared a friendship with India and represented many

segments of Bangladeshi society, the speaker also extended his remarks to Indian military veterans and Bangladeshi Muktiyoddhas. During the visit, two notable formal declarations were made. Firstly, the appointment of the inaugural occupant of the Bangabandhu Chair at Delhi University was announced. Secondly, the "Nutan India-Bangladesh Maitree Muktiyoddha Sontan Scholarship Scheme" was extended for a duration of five years. The National Museum of Bangladesh received a MiG-21 aircraft dating back to 1971.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a historic visit to Bangladesh from March 26 to 27, 2021, marking the first time he had travelled to the country since the global outbreak of the Covid-19 virus. The purpose of his visit was to participate in three momentous events: the Golden Jubilee Year commemorating Bangladesh's Independence, the Birth Centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh. The Prime Minister of our country paid homage by placing a wreath at the National Martyrs' Memorial located in Savar. Additionally, the Prime Minister became the inaugural foreign dignitary to visit the tomb of Bangabandhu situated at Tungipara, Gopalganj. The Prime Minister undertook visits to the Matua community temple located in Orakandi, Gopalganj district, as well as the Jashoreshwari Temple situated in Satkhira district. Furthermore, the Prime Minister delivered a speech to a local assembly of community leaders. The delegation-level discussions between the prime ministers of the two countries, as well as the exchange of five documents on disaster management and mitigation, the cooperation between the National Cadet Corps of India and Bangladesh, the establishment of a framework for cooperation on trade remedial measures, and the provision of ICT equipment, reference books, and training for the Bangladesh-Bharat Digital Service and Employment Training (BDSET) have all been successfully concluded.

Furthermore, alongside the prominent diplomatic exchanges between the two nations, discussions have occurred among senior officials across various bilateral establishments. The comprehensive collaboration between the two nations encompasses both conventional sectors such as tourism, health, and education, as well as emerging domains such information technology, space exploration, and nuclear research.

DEFENCE COOPERATION:

On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, India and Bangladesh commemorated the 1971 War, a conflict in which their respective armed services collaborated closely. During this specific time frame, a number of bilateral engagements occurred within the military domain as a result of reciprocal visits made by the Chiefs of the Indian and Bangladeshi Armed Forces to each other's respective countries.

TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY:

India and Bangladesh are connected through many modes of transportation. Within the vicinity of the border, there exist a total of 36 operational Land Customs Stations (LCSs) and two Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) that effectively ease the transportation of goods via road. The Petrapole-Benapole Integrated Check Post (ICP), which facilitates over 50% of the bilateral trade, was scheduled to commence round-the-clock operations from August 1, 2017.

The Protocol on Inland Water Trade and Transit (PIWTT) has been in effect since 1972. The transportation of goods from India is facilitated through the utilisation of barges and vessels, which navigate over the river systems of Bangladesh along eight designated routes. Under the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT), commodities were transported to the North-Eastern States of India by means of transshipment at the Ashuganj river port, followed by overland transportation via the Akhaura-Agartala route.

The Coastal Shipping Agreement, which was established during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh in June 2015, has additionally enabled the direct transit of containerized, bulk, and dry cargo via sea routes between the two nations. Commencing in February 2017, container ship services were initiated between Kolkata and Pangaon, which is situated approximately 20 km away from Dhaka.

Currently, there are four operational inter-country train routes of Broad Gauge, which have replaced the former six routes. The reopening of the Radhikapur-Birol train link during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit in April 2017 marked a notable development. In addition to the aforementioned projects, progress is currently being made on the construction of the remaining two additional railway

lines. In April 2017, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India included the testing of the 2nd Maitri Express, which operates between Khulna in Bangladesh and Kolkata in India.

Daily bus services are available connecting Kolkata and Dhaka, Shillong and Dhaka, as well as Agartala and Dhaka. A new bus service, connecting the cities of Dhaka, Khulna, and Kolkata, was inaugurated during the visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in April 2017.

The Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) is anticipated to have a substantial positive impact on road connectivity. An experiment was conducted in August 2016 to assess the feasibility of transporting freight through trucks from Kolkata to Agartala through Dhaka, and from Dhaka to New Delhi through Kolkata and Lucknow.

The Haldibari (India)-Chilahati (Bangladesh) rail connection, the sixth such reconstructed rail route between India and Bangladesh, will become operational on August 1, 2021, allowing for enhanced sub-regional connectivity. Furthermore, this would facilitate goods flow from Bangladesh to Nepal and Bhutan, as well as vice versa. Between 1947 and 1965, India and the former East Pakistan had seven rail lines. Petrapole (India)-Benapole, Gede (India)-Darshana (Bangladesh), Singhabad (India)-Rohanpur (Bangladesh), and Radhikapur (India)-Biroi (Bangladesh) are the other four active rail linkages between India and Bangladesh.

In September 2021, a recently constructed Passenger Terminal Building was established at the Integrated Check Post (ICP) Petrapole with the aim of enhancing cross-border connectivity and modernising border infrastructure. The ICP Petrapole, situated in India, is recognised as the seventh largest international immigration port. It holds significant importance as a land port, serving as a crucial connection point between the two countries. The port witnesses a substantial passenger flow of 23 lakh annually. Efforts are being made to enhance the institutional processes with the aim of enhancing connectivity and facilitating commercial activities.

ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY:

Bangladesh has the position of India's most significant commercial partner within the South Asian region, whereas India occupies the role of Bangladesh's primary trading partner within the broader Asian context. The bilateral trade volume between the aforementioned nations amounted to USD 10.78 billion for the fiscal year 2020-21.

DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERSHIP:

Currently, Bangladesh plays a significant role as a key development partner for India. India has extended lines of credit (LOCs) to Bangladesh for the purpose of facilitating the construction of various types of infrastructure, encompassing road networks, railway systems, maritime routes, and harbours. In conjunction with Lines of Credit (LOCs), the Indian government has allocated subsidies to Bangladesh for various infrastructure initiatives, including the dredging of inland waterways in Bangladesh and the establishment of the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline, which facilitates the transportation of High Speed Diesel to Bangladesh.

High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) represent a significant element of India's development assistance endeavours. The Indian government has provided funding for many projects, including the establishment of student dorms, academic buildings, skill development and training facilities, cultural centres, and orphanages. At present, an additional 14 High-Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) are underway.

India plays a significant role in facilitating Bangladesh's development cooperation through a multitude of ongoing training programmes and scholarships. The Government of India has been offering training programmes to civil servants, police officers, and judicial officials from Bangladesh at several esteemed training institutions in India.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH:

The ITEC training programmes annually benefit over 800 individuals from Bangladesh, which is recognised as one of the prominent partner countries of ITEC. Despite the current transition of the programme to a virtual format, it is noteworthy that a significant number of individuals from Bangladesh, namely over 180, have actively registered for e-ITEC courses. In February 2022, a dedicated website was created to cater to the needs of Bangladeshi students who are considering pursuing undergraduate, graduate, and M.Phil./Ph.D. programmes at esteemed educational institutions in India, specifically the IITs and NIITs, which are under the purview of the Government of India. In

March 2021, the Indian government made a public declaration regarding the allocation of 1000 "Suborno Jayanti Scholarships" to students from Bangladesh.

CULTURAL COOPERATION:

The commemoration of the shared cultural affinities between the two nations is taking place at the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre and the Indian Cultural Centre in Dhaka. The organisation facilitates the cultivation of cross-cultural connections by means of its training programmes in yoga, kathak, Manipuri dance, Hindi, and Hindustani classical music, as well as through cultural events showcasing esteemed performers from Bangladesh and India.

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DEVELOPMENT IN VISAs:

To address the healthcare requirements of visa applicants necessitating immediate medical attention in India, while complying with the Covid-19 restrictions set by the government of Bangladesh, the establishment of Indian Visa Application Centres (IVAC) was undertaken at a localised level in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the provision of this service has been discontinued due to the elimination of those limitations. The objective of this initiative is to facilitate a gradual liberalisation of the visa application process by the Indian government, with the simultaneous aim of developing enhanced interpersonal contacts between India and Bangladesh. The largest foreign visa operation in India comprises a network of application centres spread around the country, a high volume of daily applications, and a significant number of visas granted.

COOPERATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

On the fifteenth of March in the year 2020, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, engaged in a video conference with the leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) at the behest of Prime Minister Modi. The participants engaged in a discourse about optimal methodologies, delineated common strategies to combat the virus, and assessed the impact of the outbreak on their respective nations. The participants also engaged in a discourse regarding the impact of the pandemic on their various nations. The Indian government has started offering online training courses to Bangladeshi medical professionals, equipping them with the necessary skills to diagnose, treat, and provide care for individuals affected by COVID-19.

The Indian government has sent a total of 3.3 million doses of Covishield vaccines to assist Bangladesh in its continued efforts to tackle the outbreak. The present magnitude of Covid vaccines being shipped from India to a specific nation has attained its peak level thus far. The Government of Bangladesh, BEXIMCO Pharmaceuticals Limited of Bangladesh, and the Serum Institute of India (SII) have established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the objective of purchasing 30 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine from the SII on a commercial basis.

India has dispatched a total of 109 ambulances equipped with life support systems to Bangladesh, in accordance with the commitment made by Prime Minister Modi during his official visit to the country in March 2021. In August 2021, a donation of more than 20 tonnes of essential medical equipment, including oxygen nasal cannulas, oxygen face masks, oxygen flow metres, non-rebreather masks, pulse oximeters, high flow nasal cannulas, medical oxygen cylinders, and infrared thermometers, was made to Bangladesh.

The historical and political significance of travel between India and Bangladesh is readily apparent, given the absence of land transport connections between these two nations during a span of 43 years. The absence of connectivity originated with the partition of Bengal and India in 1947. The principal means of transportation between the two nations encompass the Kolkata-Dhaka Bus, which was launched in 1999, and the Dhaka-Agartala Bus, which was established in 2001. Furthermore, it is worth noting that both nations are presently engaged in the development of a direct Kolkata-Agartala transport corridor that through Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. The Maitree Express, sometimes referred to as the Friendship Express, was established with the objective of restoring a railway link between the urban centres of Kolkata and Dhaka.

The passenger train service between Kolkata and Dhaka Cantonment was reinstated in 2008 by the Maitree Express, marking its resumption after a hiatus of 43 years since Bangladesh gained independence. The railway system covers a distance of 393 km and operates on a five-day schedule.

CONCLUSION:

India and Bangladesh, as neighbouring countries, enjoy a strong organic connection due to their common heritage and intertwined history. They both possess collective memories of significant loss, particularly in relation to the large displacement of families following the Partition of India in 1947. The historical connections between these two nations have resulted in multifaceted and continuously growing bilateral relationships. The close geographical closeness of the two nations offers a favourable circumstance for enhancing their interconnectivity and economic development.

In recent times, there has been notable advancement in the bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh, evident through heightened diplomatic interactions, enhanced trade partnerships, and strengthened interpersonal ties. The diplomatic ties between both countries have reached a positive point, as they have successfully achieved a mutual understanding on various matters including marine delimitation, land boundary arrangement, enclaves, short sea shipping, and interior waterways. In light of the prevailing conditions, the commemoration of India's Republic Day on January 26, 2021, has assumed significant importance in the context of the half-century of diplomatic ties between India and Bangladesh. In a notable development, a group of 122 individuals from the tri-services of the Bangladesh Armed Forces made their inaugural appearance in the Indian Republic Day parade. In anticipation of the forthcoming occasion, a virtual summit meeting was convened on 17 December 2020, during which both nations reached a mutual agreement to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of their diplomatic relations. During the commemoration of the Mujib Borsho in Bangladesh (17 March 2020 – 16 March 2021), India expresses its reverence for the martyrs from both nations who valiantly laid down their lives during the conflict that culminated in the establishment of Bangladesh as an independent nation.

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