

45 years of China- Bangladesh relations

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Since the establishment of diplomatic ties 45 years ago, the two countries have enhanced political mutual trust and deepened mutually beneficial cooperation. But historically India and Bangladesh have maintained close relations. With Indo-China conflict on rise, the geo-political equation is set to change in the region.

In news: China Bangladesh celebrated 75 years of diplomatic relations.

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign affairs

Static dimensions

1. History of relations
2. How has it affected India?
3. What should India do to counter it?

Current dimensions

1. In news

Content:

In news:

- Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Bangladesh counterpart, Mohammad Abdul Hamid, exchanged congratulatory messages on the 45th anniversary of the establishment of the bilateral diplomatic relationship.
- China is ready to work with Bangladesh to better align the two countries' strategies and jointly promote the construction of the Belt and Road.
- With over \$26 billion Chinese investments and \$38 billion dollars funding commitments, Bangladesh is one

of the largest recipients of China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI).

- China has also offered **zero-tariff treatment to 97% of Bangladesh's exports.**
- Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, China and Bangladesh have stuck together and fought against the pandemic side by side.
- Bangladesh is one of the countries where China's covid vaccine is under clinical trial.

History of relations:

Geo-political:

- When the Bangladesh War of Independence broke out in 1971, the Bangladeshis elicited the help of India in their freedom struggle.
- China became an ally of Pakistan.
- As a permanent member of UNSC, China used its first veto to support Pakistan during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.
- Despite the support of most countries in the world, Bangladesh's UN membership was vetoed by China until 1974.
- However, China and Bangladesh established diplomatic relations in January 1976.
- The period saw the Chinese begin to embrace market socialism.
- Then **Bangladesh President Ziaur Rahman**, who restored free markets in Bangladesh, visited Beijing and laid the groundwork for the relationship.
- In 1987, a **Bangladesh-China friendship bridge** was constructed and inaugurated over river Buriganga connecting Dhaka and Munshiganj by the Chinese.
- In October 2000, the Government of Bangladesh issued a postage stamp marking the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Bangladesh-China diplomatic relations.

- In 2002, the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao made an official visit to Bangladesh and both countries declared **2005 as the “Bangladesh-China Friendship Year.”**
- On Bangladesh PM Begum Khaleda Zia’s invitation **China was added as an observer in the SAARC.**

Economy:

- **China is Bangladesh’s biggest trading partner** with bilateral trade worth \$10 billion dollars.
- The **railway projects** have become the largest area of bilateral cooperation.
- The largest-scale project in Bangladesh supported by China, the **Padma Bridge Rail Link** project is a part of the BRI.
- Other large-scale projects in Bangladesh undertaken by China include the Bangabandhu International Conference Center, Payra Coal-fired Power Plant, and the IV Tier National Data Center.
- The **Multi-lane Road Tunnel Project under the Karnaphuli River**, once finished, will be the first underwater tunnel in Bangladesh and even South Asia.

Strategic:

- Defence ties between the two countries is considered a major strength of the relationship.
- China is the only country with which Bangladesh signed a Defense Cooperation agreement in 2002.
- China is the biggest arms supplier to Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh defense forces are equipped with Chinese arms including tanks, missile launchers, fighter aircraft and several weapons systems.
- China provides training to officers of the Bangladesh army.
- In 2008, Bangladesh set up an anti-ship missile launch pad near the Chittagong Port with assistance from China.

Culture:

- Beijing is providing scholarships to students to study in China and encouraging Bangladeshis to learn Chinese.
- A Chinese language centre was established in Bangladesh University of professionals, run by the Bangladesh army.
- There is flight connectivity between Beijing and Dhaka via Kunming in Yunnan.

How has it affected India?

- India and Bangladesh share the fifth-longest land boundary in the world.
- India was the first country to recognize the sovereignty of Bangladesh and establish diplomatic ties in 1971.
- In 2014, PM Modi's "Neighborhood First" policy shifted Indian foreign policy's focus towards its neighbors.
- A border issue that had existed since 1947 was resolved through a successful Land Boundary Agreement (LBA).
- In April 2017, a civil nuclear tripartite pact was signed between India, Russia and Bangladesh.
- In 2017, Dhaka didn't like India maintaining complete silence about the Rohingya influx from Myanmar to Bangladesh.
- In December, 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 followed the India-wide NRC announcement.
- This brought a new concern for Bangladesh, as India equated Pakistan with a long time ally, Bangladesh.
- India indirectly implied the poor treatment of religious minorities in Bangladesh and brought negative publicity for Dhaka.
- The rising tensions over the new citizenship law pushed the public consensus of Bangladesh toward China.
- After failing to secure a water-sharing agreement with India over the Teesta river, the fourth-longest river in the country that flows from India, Bangladesh turned to China to develop a \$1 billion agreement to prevent floods and erosion during rains and water shortages in the dry season.

- This approach will severely damage India as water is a political issue in Bangladesh.
- China has replaced India as the top trade partner in Bangladesh in 2015.
- Bangladesh's "Look East" policy is essentially designed to lessen the Dhaka's dependence on India and open up new avenues of cooperation with China and Southeast Asia.

What should India do to counter it?

- China's economic and strategic ambitions in the Indian Ocean region has been given a jolt with the Bangladesh government officially calling off the development of a deep-sea port at Sonadia Island by China in Bay of Bengal.
- Bangladesh health ministry has refused to co-finance the clinical trial of an experimental Chinese COVID-19 vaccine developed by Sinovac Biotech in Bangladesh.
- India should utilise the loopholes in China-Bangladesh relations for repairing its ties with Dhaka.
- Over the last few months, India has supported Bangladesh's stand on Rohingyas.
- New Delhi has provided medical aid to Dhaka during COVID pandemic.
- Bangladesh has promised 1.5 million dollars to prime minister Modi's call for a regional emergency fund.
- Water sharing issues have badly strained bilateral relations, a conflict that China has sought to leverage to its own advantage.
- **Solving the Teesta dispute**, and cementing ties with Bangladesh, takes India further towards its goal of being a global leader.
- Though the checkbook diplomacy of China has brought it and Bangladesh closer, Bangladesh cannot escape the geographical reality that it is almost completely surrounded by India with a 4,096-kilometer shared

border. Robust and cordial ties with India are thus critical for Bangladesh's economic development and national security.

Mould your thought:

1. How has China – Bangladesh relations evolved in recent years? What are the implications of these close ties on India?

Approach to the answer:

- Write the China- Bangladesh historical relations in brief
- Write recent China's leverage in Bangladesh
- How is India affected by it?
- Conclude with how India can tackle it.