

Celebrating 50 Years of India-Bangladesh Relations

January 30, 2021

India-Bangladesh relations are diversified and strategic, and the recent initiative to welcome the Bangladeshi tri service contingent in 2021 India's Republic Day parade has been a landmark move as Bangladesh celebrates 50 years of its independence. There is further scope to widen bilateral relations through mutual benefit, and huge prospects to develop people to people connect.

In news: A 122-member contingent of the Bangladesh Armed Forces participated in the 72nd Republic Day parade to commemorate 50 years of the Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign Affairs

Dimensions:

- Provisions Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1971
- 50 years of Relationship
- Economic Relations
- Defence Relations
- Cultural Relations
- Contentious Issues in Relationship
- How should India address them?

Content:

Provisions Treaty of Peace and Friendship:

- The **India-Bangladesh Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace** was signed on 19 March 1972 forging close bilateral relations between India and the newly established state of Bangladesh.
- The treaty was also known as the **Indira-Mujib Treaty**, after the signatories of the treaty the Prime Minister

of India Indira Gandhi and the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

- There are twelve Articles incorporated in the treaty

Important provisions of the treaty are as follows:

- Indian and Bangladesh shall aspire for lasting peace and friendship between the two countries and each side shall respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the other side.
- Condemned colonialism and racialism of all forms, and work toward eliminating it
- Reaffirmed faith in the policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence as important factors for easing tension in the world.
- parties shall maintain regular contacts and exchange views with each other on major international problems affecting the interest of both the states;
- They shall continue mutually advantageous and all round co-operation in the economic, scientific and technical fields
- Agreed to make joint studies and take joint action in the field of flood control, river basin development and development of hydro-electric power and irrigation;
- Promote relations in the field of arts, literature, education, culture, sports and health;
- In accordance with the ties of friendship existing between the two countries, Both countries shall not enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other.
- Any differences interpreting any Article of the treaty shall be settled on a bilateral basis by peaceful means in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

50 years of Relationship:

- India's links with Bangladesh are civilisational,

cultural, social, and economic.

- Commonalities of a shared history and common heritage, linguistic and cultural ties, passion for music, literature and the arts unite both countries
- **Rabindranath Tagore** created the national anthems of both Bangladesh and India in 1905 and 1911 respectively.
- India was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh and establish diplomatic relations immediately after its independence in December 1971.
- Diplomatic relations between the two countries formally began with the visit of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 19 March 1972, at Dhaka, where she signed the **Indo-Bangladeshi Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace**
- Since January 2009, when India-Bangladesh relations entered a new phase, both countries have managed to solve a number of vexed issues.
- Issues such as the land and maritime border disputes were sorted out at considerable disadvantage to India.
- In the land border dispute, India lost 10,000 acres of land while in the maritime dispute the **United Nations (UN) tribunal** awarded Dhaka 19,467 sq. km of the 25,602 sq. km sea area of Bay of Bengal. India chose to ignore the disadvantages in the interest of building a friendly and sustainable relationship with Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh cooperated with India in sorting out security issues in the Northeast.
- India's northeastern region had been plagued by insurgency for a number of years and many insurgent leaders took shelter in Bangladesh earlier. Post improvement in relations, Bangladesh handed over these leaders and shut down their training camps.
- Prominent among them were Ranjan Daimary, the founder-chief of **National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)** and Anup Chetia of the **United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)**.
- Bangladesh also took the remarkable step of granting a

trans-shipment facility to India to transport goods through Bangladesh to the Northeastern states.

- Clearly, the intention for a friendly relationship was visible on both sides.

Bangladesh Liberation War (Indo -Pak War) 1971

- During the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, India provided extensive aid, training and shelter for the exiled government of Bangladesh and **Bengali nationalist Mukti Bahini guerrilla force** that was fighting the Pakistani Army.
- Between 8 and 10 million refugees poured into India during 1971, increasing tensions between India and Pakistan.
- At the outbreak of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, the Joint Force including regular army of Bangladesh, **Mukti Bahini** and the Indian Military liberated then East Pakistan, leading to the establishment of Bangladesh.
- India's role in the independence of Bangladesh led to the development of strong bilateral relations.
- Then-Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi spoke along with Bangladesh's founding leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman before more than 500,000 people at Suhrawardy Udyan in Dhaka.

Economic Relations

Economic Aid

- India has given several loans to Bangladesh. It gave \$750 million for developing Bangladesh infrastructure in 2011
- In 2014 India extended a \$1 billion soft loan for infrastructure development.

Energy Cooperation

- India has recently introduced the concept of the

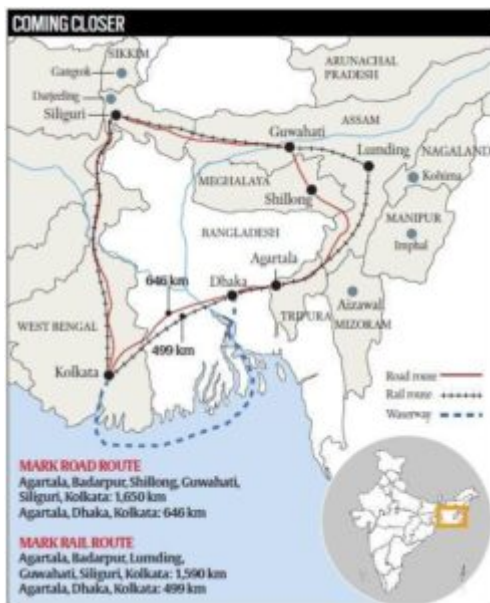
Regional Power Trading System which will help various regions of the country in **reducing the power deficit by transferring surplus power** from another region.

- Under the **Electricity Act 2003**, the Indian companies could pool power in an exchange.
- Bangladesh hopes to have access to Nepal and Bhutan's power through India. Bangladesh has formally requested a 'power corridor' to access the Bhutanese and Nepalese markets.
- It has agreed to allow India to transfer hydroelectricity from Assam to Bihar through its territory.
- Bangladesh is currently importing **1160 MW of power from India**.

Trade Ties

- Bangladesh is the **largest trade partner for India in the South Asia region**.
- India's exports to Bangladesh for financial year 2018-19 (April-March) stood at 9.21 billion USD and imports from Bangladesh stood at 1.22 Billion USD.
- Since 2011, Bangladesh enjoys Duty-Free and Quota-Free access for its exports to India under **South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)**
- Bangladesh Cabinet has approved a revised trade deal with India under which the two nations would be able to use each other's land and water routes for sending goods to a third country, removing a long-standing barrier in regional trade.
- Under the deal India would also be able to send goods to Myanmar through Bangladesh.
- Recently, **Chilahati-Haldibari rail link** was inaugurated to push regional connectivity
- Haldibari-Chilahati route will enhance connectivity to Assam and West Bengal from Bangladesh. This rail link will enhance rail network accessibility and support the

growth in bilateral trade and economic development of the region.



Defence Relations:

- Defence ties inherited a deep legacy of establishing and training the Mukti Bahini during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971.
- Various **Joint military exercises** of Army (**Exercise Sampriti**) and Navy (**Exercise Milan**) take place between the two countries.
- In April 2017, Bangladesh and India signed two defence agreements, the first such agreements between India and any of its neighbors. Under the agreements, the militaries of the two countries will conduct joint exercises and training.
- The militaries of the two countries have played quite an extensive role in taking up common issues to enhance and conduct training programmes to deal with counter terrorism issues, natural disasters, ensure **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Reliefs (HADR)**
- In 2019, they have agreed for a closer cooperation to fight against extremist radical groups, terrorist organisations, smuggling of arms, drugs and fake currency and also organized crime as a shared priority.

- In the proposed bilateral defence agreement signed between the nations, India has made a promise looking forward to equip the Defence forces of Bangladesh and help them to meet their demands of expert training with assuring logistical and technical support, which would help Bangladesh attain self-efficiency in the defence manufacturing sector for the long run.
- The **India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement (LBA)** came into force following the exchange of instruments of ratification in June 2015. India and Bangladesh share 4096.7 km. of border, which is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours.

Cultural Relations

- Given the shared history and commonality of language, cultural exchanges form an important bond of friendship between the people of two countries.
- Special emphasis has been laid on promotion of exchanges in the fields of music, theatre, art, painting, books, etc.
- A bilateral **Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP)** provides the framework for such exchanges.
- To promote bilateral cultural exchanges, the **Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC)** of Indian Council for Cultural Relations was inaugurated at Dhaka on March 11, 2010.
- Every year 200 Bangladeshi students receive **ICCR scholarships**.
- India has offered scholarships for meritorious Bangladeshi under and postgraduate students and PhD researchers to undertake studies in traditional systems of medicines like Ayurveda, Unani and Homeopathy
- Under India's **Neighbourhood First policy**, India assured that vaccines for Covid-19 would be made available to Bangladesh as and when produced in India.
- India has also offered collaboration in therapeutics

and partnership in vaccine production.

Contentious Issues in Relationship:

Teesta River Water Dispute

- The Teesta is an important river for Bangladesh. It helps in irrigation in the northern parts of Bangladesh, which is often considered as the granary of the country.
- No agreement has taken place on the sharing of Teesta river waters so far.
- Bangladesh wants to manage the water of its side by building a reservoir so that it could use it in an optimum manner and all through the year.
- Water is a state subject in India. The issue of Teesta river water could not be solved because of the non-cooperation of the West Bengal Government.

Bangladesh's Closeness to China

- Bangladesh enjoys a **close relationship with China** and there is bipartisan consensus over the approach to be taken towards it.
- China is Bangladesh's main arms supplier, investor and trade partner. It has invested large sums in Bangladesh on a string of power and infrastructure projects.
- Between 2008 and 2018, China supplied weapons worth \$1.93 billion to Bangladesh. This constitutes 71.8 percent of Bangladesh's military acquisitions over this period and makes China the biggest supplier of arms to Dhaka.
- Although **Bangladesh's dependence on China has increased**, it has always tried to balance its relationship with India and China.
- The **Awami League Government** has shown sensitivity to India's security concerns and avoided projects that have such implications.

- The recent purchase of two Submarines for the Bangladesh Navy from China has provoked India's concerns and ramifications.
- Bangladesh's tilt towards China to undertake the Teesta river project is being perceived by many as Dhaka turning away from India

Issue of NRC and CAA

- There are some apprehensions in Bangladesh over India's **National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)**
- Many Bangladeshi analysts expressed fears that Indian Muslims, unable to prove their citizenship claims, will seek shelter in Bangladesh.
- However, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said the CAA and NRC are India's internal matter.

The issue of illegal migration

- The **Indo-Bangladesh border is porous** and migrants are able to cross illegally, though sometimes only in return for financial or other incentives to border security personnel.
- Illegal immigration from Bangladesh, comprising both Hindus and Muslims, is an important issue from the national security perspective of India.
- A large number of Bangladeshi immigrants are illegally living in India. Hindus are said to have migrated after facing religious persecution, whereas most of the Muslim migrants are termed as economic migrants.
- **Bangladeshi officials have denied the existence of Bangladeshis living in India** and those illegal migrants found are described as having been trafficked.
- The total denial of such a phenomenon only hardens sentiments in India over the issue.

Regime specific relations

- An oft-expressed fear is that the upsurge in relationship between India and Bangladesh is regime-specific.
- There is bipartisan support on the Indian side to maintain friendly relationship with Bangladesh.
- The same cannot be said about the Bangladeshi side where the political opposition at the first opportunity is likely to take steps that could derail the relationship.
- The opposition in Bangladesh has tried its best to convince its interlocutors in India that their attitude has changed. However, it remains to be seen whether it is so.

Drug Trafficking

- Bangladesh is increasingly being used as a transit point by drug dealers and the drug mafia, which dispatches heroin and opium from Burma, and other countries of the golden triangle, to different destinations.
- As a result, Bangladesh's Department of Narcotics Control has come under the scanner several times and invited criticism.
- Bangladesh has become the prime transit route for trafficking heroin to Europe from Southeast Asia, according to a report from the **International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)** 2007 annual report.

How should India address them?

- The domestic politics of India has made the settlement of the Teesta issue tricky. Sorting out these differences would be key to solving the water dispute.
- India should improve diplomatic engagement through the office of the new **High Commissioner to Dhaka**.
- Making Bangladesh one of the key pillars of India's 'Neighbourhood First' Policy.
- India has to remain careful of both China and Pakistan,

who would like to wean South Asian countries away from India.

- India has to **follow a proactive foreign policy**. It cannot afford to simply react to what China and Pakistan do.

Mould your thought: What are the challenges ahead for India-Bangladesh Relationship? How can both countries iron out these differences?

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Mention cordial nature of Indo-Bangladesh relations briefly
- Discuss the problems in relations between India and Bangladesh
- Mention the solutions to these issues
- Conclusion