



AIR Discussions (March 1st Week)

AIR SPOTLIGHT 4th MARCH 2021

INDIA BANGLADESH RELATIONS

CONTEXT:

- India has **dispatched two warships to the historical port town of Monglaim Bangladesh** to commemorate the ongoing “Swarnim Vijay Varsh”, the 50th anniversary celebrations of the 1971 War of Liberation.
- PM Modi will **inaugurate ‘Maitri Setu’** between India and Bangladesh.
- The bridge ‘Maitri Setu’ has been built over the Feni river which flows between the Indian boundary in Tripura and Bangladesh.
- Commemorating **50 years of the 1971 India-Pakistan war** that led to the liberation of Bangladesh, a **contingent of the Bangladesh Armed Forces had recently participated in the 72nd Republic Day parade.**
- This year, India and Bangladesh are also celebrating **50 years of the establishment of their ties.**
- The leaders of the two nations, Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina, meet virtually in December 2020.

BACKGROUND OF RELATIONS:

- India’s links with Bangladesh are civilizational, cultural, social and economic.
- India was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh and establish diplomatic relations immediately after its independence in December 1971.
- In addition to the high level visits and exchanges between the two countries, there have also been various visits at senior official level for participating in various bilateral mechanisms.
- The multi-dimensional cooperation between the two countries ranges from traditional sectors of tourism, health and education to frontier technologies of nuclear science, space and information technology.
- **Security and 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.
 - Director General (DG) Level Talks between Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) are regularly held.
- **Defense Cooperation:**
 - Various Joint exercises of Army (Exercise Sampriti) and Navy (Exercise Milan) take place between the two countries.
 - High level exchanges at the level of services chief, conduct of annual defense dialogue and tri-services staff talks, service specific talks have contributed to significant improvement in bilateral defense cooperation.
- **Connectivity:**
 - Both countries jointly inaugurated the newly restored railway link between Haldibari (India) and Chilahati (Bangladesh).



- Welcomed the signing of the second addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT).
- Agreed to an early operationalization of the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative Motor Vehicles Agreement.
- Both the governments are undertaking various measures to restore the pre-1965 rail links and other connectivity links that existed between India and Bangladesh.
- To enhance people to people contacts, it has been decided to increase the frequency of two passenger trains, i.e., Maitree Express and Bandhan Express.
- Both the governments decided to commence Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka and Dhaka-Siliguri-Darjeeling-Dhaka bus service.
- **Economic and Commercial:**
 - Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia.
 - India's exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 stood at US\$ 9.21 bn and imports from Bangladesh during the same period were US\$1.04 bn.
 - Bangladesh has appreciated the Duty-Free and Quota Free access given to Bangladeshi exports to India under South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) since 2011.
 - Border haats are regularly held.
 - Cooperation in power sector has become one of the hallmarks of India- Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh is currently importing 1160 MW of power from India.
 - Rooppur atomic energy project: India will provide personnel training, consultation support and participate in the construction and erection activity and non-critical materials supply to the site in Bangladesh.
- **Development Partnership:**
 - Bangladesh is the biggest development partner of India today.
 - India has extended 3 Lines of Credits (LOC) to Bangladesh in the last 8 years amounting to US\$ 8 billion for development of infrastructure in various sectors including roads, railways, shipping and ports.
 - In addition to LOCs, India has also been providing grant assistance to Bangladesh for various infrastructure projects including construction of Akhaura-Agartala rail link, dredging of inland waterways in Bangladesh and construction of India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline.
 - India has funded 55 Small Development Projects including construction of student hostels, academic buildings, cultural centers and orphanages etc in Bangladesh and another 26 SDPs are being implemented.
- **Capacity Building and Human Resource Development:** Human resource development is a key component of India's development cooperation efforts in Bangladesh through its several ongoing training programs and scholarships.
- **Cooperation over Rivers:**
 - India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers.
 - A bilateral Joint Rivers Commission has been working since June 1972 to maintain liaison between the two countries to maximize benefits from common river systems.
- **Partnership on Multilateral forums:**
 - Both countries agreed to continue working together towards achieving early reforms of the UN Security Council, combating climate change, attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and protection of the rights of migrants.
 - Both are members of SAARC, BIMSTEC, IORA
- **Space and technology:**
 - South Asian Satellite (SAARC Satellite) has been launched to boost regional connectivity in the areas of disaster management, tele-education, tele-medicine inter-government networks etc.



- **During Covid 19:**
 - Reiterating the highest priority India attaches to Bangladesh 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.

SIGNIFICANCE OF BANGLADESH FOR INDIA:

- **Security of North East:** A friendly Bangladesh can ensure that its soil is not used for anti-India activities.
- **Connectivity of North East and bridge to Southeast Asia.**
- **Strengthening South Asia as a regional power.**
- **Securing sea lines of communication.**
- **Fighting terrorism and deradicalization**
- **Balancing China**
- Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and hence has **great economic significance for India**. Further, Cumulative Foreign Direct Investment from India to Bangladesh has more than doubled from 2014 to 2018.

CHALLENGES IN RELATIONSHIP:

- **River disputes:** Some of the major disputes include: Teesta River water sharing issue, Tipaimukh Hydro-Electric Power Project on the Barak River, Ganga river dispute etc.
- **Illegal immigrants:** NRC has left out 1.9 million Assamese from the list with a group labelled as "illegal immigrants from Bangladesh" living in Assam post-1971.
- **Rohingya Issue**
- **Border Management:** porous border provides pathway for smuggling, trafficking in arms, drugs and people and cattle.
- Delay in project execution
- China and Pakistani angle
- Presence of groups like Harkat-alJihad-al-Islami, Jamaat-e-Islami, fuel Anti-India sentiments in Bangladesh.
- **Violent border incidents:** At least 25 Bangladeshis were killed in the first six months of this year along the border by Indian forces, according to a rights watchdog.
- There are several instances when Dhaka felt that India didn't live up to its promises.
- Citizenship (Amendment) Act and National Register of Citizens have created a negative impression in Bangladesh of India's intent.

WAY FORWARD:

- India should **adopt the Gujral doctrine** of unilateral support to its smaller neighbours to gain their confidence and reach out to Dhaka with an **open mind**.
- India should **leverage the shared culture-history and economic complementarities and build people to people relationships** to build strong relationship between two nations.
- Both countries need to look at strengthening economic cooperation through joint investments and cooperation under the '**Blue Economy**' programme.
- India should support Bangladesh's **fight against radical elements**.



It is important to address specific issues like Teesta and to respond to Dhaka's call for help on the Rohingya issue.

- The two countries share 54 transboundary rivers, and **water management** is the key to prosperity.
- **Effective border management** for ensuring a tranquil, stable and crime free border.
- The two countries need to **focus on priority areas, such as investments, security connectivity development, cross border energy cooperation, blue economy, cultural economy, environment and disaster management etc.**

SOURCES:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ahead-of-pms-visit-india-sends-warships-to-bangladesh-to-50th-anniversary-of-1971-war/articleshow/81378660.cms>

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<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-modi-to-inaugurate-maitri-setu-between-india-and-bangladesh-on-march-9/articleshow/81380239.cms>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/49-years-on-india-bangladesh-should-deal-with-unresolved-issues/story-U89UhWKCvatR08Og1YjvPP.html>



NEWS IN BRIEF: PRELIMS SPECIAL

EX Desert FLAG VI

- EX Desert FLAG VI is currently undergoing at Al-Dhafra airbase, UAE.
- Ex Desert Flag is an **annual multi-national large force employment warfare exercise hosted by the United Arab Emirates Air Force.**
- The **Indian Air Force is participating for the first time.**
- The aim of the exercise is to provide operational exposure to the participating forces while training them to undertake simulated air combat operations in a controlled environment.
- The participating forces will get an opportunity to enhance their operational capabilities along with mutual exchange of best practices.

<http://newsonair.com/Main-News-Details.aspx?id=410987>

World Wildlife Day

- World Wildlife Day observed on **3 March.**
- In December 2013, the United Nations General Assembly had proclaimed March 3 as UN World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness about animals and plants.
- 3 March was chosen as the day since on this day in 1973, the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was adopted.**
- The theme for the 2021 celebrations is '**Forests and Livelihoods: Sustaining People and Planet**'.
- The **idea behind the decision to observe this day was proposed by Thailand.**

<http://newsonair.com/News?title=World-Wildlife-Day-being-celebrated-under-the-theme-%26%2339%3BForests-and-Livelihoods%3A-Sustaining-People-and-Planet%26%2339%3B&id=411022>

Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)

- DRDO conducts **successful flight test of Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet.**
- The successful demonstration of Solid Fuel based Ducted Ramjet technology has provided DRDO with a technological advantage which will **enable it to develop long range air-to-air missiles.**
- At present, such technology is available only with a handful of countries in the world.



- The Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet is a **missile propulsion system that includes a thrust modulated ducted rocket with a reduced smoke nozzle-less missile booster.**
- The thrust modulation in the system is achieved using a hot gas flow controller.
- The system utilises a solid fuelled air-breathing ramjet engine.
- **Unlike solid-propellant rocket, the Ramjet takes up oxygen from the atmosphere during flight.**

<http://newsonair.com/Main-News-Details.aspx?id=411200>

2023 as International Year of Millets

- UN General Assembly has adopted India's resolution to declare 2023 as International Year of Millets.
- India's proposal to observe an International Year of Millets in 2023 was approved by the FAO in 2018.
- India celebrated 2018 as the national year of millets.
- **Millet is a collective term referring to a number of small-seeded annual grasses that are cultivated as grain crops, primarily on marginal lands in dry areas in temperate, subtropical and tropical regions.**
- Some of the common millets available in India are Ragi (Finger millet), Jowar (Sorghum), Sama (Little millet), Bajra (Pearl millet), and Variga (Proso millet).
- Millets are less expensive and nutritionally superior to wheat & rice owing to their high protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals like iron content.
- Millets are also rich in calcium and magnesium.

<http://newsonair.com/News?title=UN-General-Assembly-adopts-India%26%2339%3bs-resolution-to-declare-2023-as-International-Year-of-Millets&id=411098>

Ease of Living Index

- The Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has released the final rankings of Ease of Living Index (EoLI) 2020.
- The Ease of Living Index (EoLI) is an assessment tool that evaluates **the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development.**



- Million+ category: Bengaluru emerged as the top performer followed by Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai
- In the Less than Million category: Shimla was ranked the highest in ease of living, followed by Bhubaneswar, Silvassa, Kakinada.

<http://newsonair.com/News?title=Bengaluru-and-Shimla-among-%26%2339%3bMost-liveable%26%2339%3b-cities-across-country%3b-Union-Minister-Hardeep-Singh-Puri-issues-Ease-of-Living-Index&id=411113>

Freedom in the World 2021 Report

- The Freedom in the World 2021 report has **downgraded India's status from 'Free' to 'Partly Free'**.
- The most free countries in the world, with a score of 100, are **Finland, Norway and Sweden, while the least free with a score of 1 are Tibet and Syria**.
- Published by USA based human rights watchdog Freedom House, which is largely funded through USA government grants, has been tracking the course of democracy since 1941.
- Scores are based on political rights indicators such as the electoral process, political pluralism and participation and government functioning.
- Civil liberties indicators related to freedom of expression and belief, associational and organisational rights, the rule of law and personal autonomy and individual rights.
- India's score was 67, a drop from 71/100 from last year.
- **Reasons for India's Fall:**
 - Attacks on press freedom have escalated dramatically, and reporting has become significantly less ambitious in recent years.
 - India appears to have abandoned its potential to serve as a global democratic leader, elevating narrow Hindu nationalist interests.
 - The government shut down Internet connectivity in Kashmir as well as on Delhi's borders, India's Internet freedom score dropped to just 51.
 - Response to Covid-19 included a hamfisted lockdown that resulted in the dangerous and unplanned displacement of millions of internal migrant workers.
 - Muslims were disproportionately blamed for the spread of the virus and faced attacks by vigilante mobs.



- The government intensified its crackdown on protesters opposed to a discriminatory citizenship law and arrested dozens of journalists who aired criticism of the official pandemic response.
- Uttar Pradesh's law prohibiting forced religious conversion through interfaith marriage was also listed as a concern.

<http://newsonair.com/News?title=Govt-describes-Freedom-House-report-which-downgraded-India%E2%80%99s-status-as-misleading&id=411202>