



## RSTV BIG PICTURE

# STRENGTHENING INDIA- BANGLADESH TIES

## INTRODUCTION:

- In a reflection of their rapidly growing ties, India and Bangladesh sealed seven agreements to expand cooperation in diverse areas, and restored a cross-border rail link, which was in operation till 1965.
- The restoration of the **Chilahati-Haldibari railway link** and signing of the pacts, providing for **cooperation in areas of hydrocarbons, agriculture and textiles** among others.
- In his initial remarks, PM Modi said **Bangladesh is a key pillar of India's "Neighbourhood First" policy** and it has been a key priority to strengthen ties between the two countries.
- In her statement, PM Hasina described **India as a "true friend"**.
- The ties between India and Bangladesh have witnessed an upswing in the last few years.
- Both sides have scaled up trade and economic engagement besides implementing a number of connectivity and infrastructure projects.

*"Relations between Bangladesh and India are based on fraternal ties and reflective of an all-encompassing partnership based on sovereignty, equality, trust and understanding that transcends a strategic partnership".*

### Chilahati-Haldibari rail link

- The Chilahati-Haldibari rail link is a trans-border railway line and it has been restored after 55 years.
- It is the fifth pre-1965 railway link between the two countries that has been made operational again.
- This rail link will help to **improve connectivity between Bangladesh and Indian states of Assam and West Bengal.**
- The rail link was originally part of the broad gauge main route that **connected Kolkata and Siliguri.**
- The restore trans-border rail link will initially facilitate the movement of goods cargo. Later, passenger movement will also begin on the route after the necessary infrastructure is put in place on both sides of the border.



## Key highlights of meet:

### Cooperation in Health Sector- addressing the global public health challenge

- India assured that vaccines would be made available to Bangladesh as and when produced in India.
- India also offered collaboration in therapeutics and partnership in vaccine production.
- Bangladesh appreciated India's conducting capacity building courses for medical professionals in Bangla language.

### Cultural Cooperation - Joint Celebration of Historical Links

- The two Prime Ministers jointly unveiled a commemorative postal stamp issued by the Government of India on the occasion of **birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked the Government of Bangladesh for issuing a stamp in honour of **Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of Gandhiji's 150th birth anniversary** celebrations earlier in September 2020.
- Commemoration of the two great leaders of the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi and Bangabandhu, will inspire values of **justice, equality and non-violence, particularly amongst the youth**.
- **2021 will be historic in India Bangladesh bilateral relations** as they would be commemorating the **fiftieth anniversary of the Liberation War** and the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh.

### Border Management and Security Cooperation

- Both sides agreed to facilitate **completion of border fencing at all pending sectors** at the international border between both the countries at the earliest beginning from the Tripura (India)- Bangladesh sector.
- Both leaders directed the border forces concerned **to enhance coordinate measures to work towards bringing border death incidents to zero**.
- The leaders stressed on **full implementation of the ongoing Coordinated Border Management Plan**.

### Trade Partnership for Growth

- Duty Free and Quota Free access is given to Bangladeshi exports by India under SAFTA since 2011.
- Recognizing the immense potential of bilateral economic and commercial ties, both country are prospecting of entering into a bilateral **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**.

### Connectivity for Prosperity

- Welcomed the recent initiatives including the **signing of the second addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT)**, trial run of trans-shipment of Indian goods from Kolkata to Agartala via Chattogram and operationalization of Sonamura-Daudkandi Protocol route.



- To facilitate better connectivity and simplify movement of passengers and goods between both the countries, both leaders agreed to an early operationalization of the **BBIN** (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) **Motor Vehicles Agreement** through MoU.
- Bangladesh expressed keen interest in the ongoing **India Myanmar Thailand trilateral highway project** and sought support of India for enabling Bangladesh to connect with this project with a view to **enhance connectivity between the regions of South and South East Asia**.
- In the same spirit, the Indian side requested Bangladesh to **allow connectivity from West Bengal (Hilli) to Meghalaya (Mahendraganj) via Bangladesh**.

### Cooperation in Water Resources, Power and Energy:

- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina highlighted the need for early signing of interim agreement for sharing of the **Teesta waters**, as agreed upon by both the governments in 2011.
- The two leaders underscored the need for early conclusion of Framework of Interim Agreement on sharing of waters of six joint rivers, namely, **Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar**.

### Forcibly Displaced Persons from the Rakhine State of Myanmar

- India appreciated the generosity of Bangladesh in sheltering and providing humanitarian assistance to the 1.1 million forcibly displaced persons from the Rakhine State of Myanmar.

### Partners in the Region and the World

- India thanked Bangladesh for supporting India in its election to the **United Nations Security Council**.
- 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**.

### Signing of Bilateral Documents and Inauguration of Projects

- Framework of Understanding (FOU) on Cooperation in Hydrocarbon Sector;
- Protocol on Trans-boundary Elephant Conservation;
- MOU regarding Indian Grant Assistance for Implementation of High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) through Local Bodies and other Public Sector Institutions;
- The following bilateral development partnership projects were also inaugurated:
  - Beautification and city development project in Rajshahi City;
  - Construction of Khalishpur Collegiate Girl's School in Khulna;

*“The India and Bangladesh relationship is considered to be a copybook example of a neighbourly relationship”.*

**How has India's relationship with Bangladesh played out over the years?**



- India and Bangladesh are two countries bound together with the **commonality of history, geography, language and culture.**
- The **1971 Liberation War** has been foundational to the India and Bangladesh friendship, which has withstood the test of time over the past 50 years.
- India has a robust relationship with Dhaka, carefully cultivated since 2008, especially with the Sheikh Hasina government at the helm.
- Notably, the **joint communique** issued after Prime Minister Hasina's visit in 2010 played a **significant role in setting the present trajectory of the relationship.** The annual consultation between foreign ministers of the two countries to supervise the development of the relationship is an outcome of the visit.
- India has benefited from its **security ties with Bangladesh**, whose **crackdown against anti-India outfits has helped the Indian government maintain peace in the eastern and North-east states.**
- Bangladesh has **benefited from its economic and development partnership.**
- India is a major development partner in Bangladesh with a **promised assistance of US\$10 billion.**
- Bangladesh is **India's biggest trade partner in South Asia.** Bilateral trade has grown steadily over the last decade: India's exports to Bangladesh in 2018-19 stood at \$9.21 billion, and imports from Bangladesh at \$1.04 billion.
- India also **grants 15 to 20 lakh visas every year to Bangladesh nationals for medical treatment, tourism, work, and just entertainment.**
- For India, Bangladesh has been a key partner in the **neighbourhood first policy** — and possibly the success story in bilateral ties among its neighbours.

#### What are irritants in INDO-Bangladesh relationship?

- Proposed countrywide **National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)** passed last year.
- Bangladesh had cancelled visits by ministers, and Hasina has expressed reservations about CAA. She commented that the CAA and the proposed nationwide NRC are **"internal matters"** of India, the CAA move was **"not necessary"**.
- Issues like **water sharing agreement on the Teesta**, which has been pending since 2011

#### How has India been engaging with Bangladesh post CAA?

- In the wake of the Ladakh standoff, **India has become more sensitive to Chinese defence inroads into Bangladesh.**
- India and Bangladesh have cooperated on pandemic-related moves. Hasina contributed \$1.5 million in India's regional emergency fund for fighting Covid-19 and India **provided medical aid to Bangladesh.**
- The two countries have also **cooperated in railways**, with India giving 10 locomotives to Bangladesh.



- The **first trial run for trans-shipment of Indian cargo through Bangladesh to Northeast states under a pact on the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports** took place in July.
- However, in recent weeks, Pakistan PM call to Hasina raised eyebrows in Delhi. While Islamabad portrayed it as a **conversation on Kashmir**, Dhaka said it was about **cooperating to deal with Covid-19**.

#### How has India sought to address China's latest move?

- During recent diplomats meeting with Hasina, “**security-related issues of mutual interest**” were discussed.
- The visit tried to address **issues on areas that have emerged as potential irritants in the relationship**.
- Bangladesh expressed “deep concern” at the rise in killings at the Indo-Bangladesh border by “BSF or Indian nationals” during the first half of this year, and the Indian side assured that the BSF authorities have been sensitised of the matter.

#### Among other issues:

- The two sides **agreed that Implementation of projects should be done in a timely manner**, and that greater attention is required to development projects in Bangladesh under the Indian Lines of Credit.
- Bangladesh **sought return of the Tablighi Jamaat members impacted by the lockdown in India**, and early release of the 25 Bangladeshi fishermen in custody in Assam. India assured Bangladesh that its nationals would be able to return soon.
- Bangladesh requested for **urgent reopening of visa issuance from the Indian High Commission in Dhaka**, particularly since many Bangladeshi patients need to visit India.
- India was also requested to **reopen travel through Benapole-Petrapole land port, which has been halted by the West Bengal government in the wake of the pandemic**.
- Bangladesh told that it is ready to collaborate in the development of a Covid-19 vaccine, including its trial, and looks forward to early, affordable availability of the vaccine when ready.

#### What is the way ahead?

- While the **Teesta project is important and urgent from India's point of view**, it will be difficult to address it before the West Bengal elections due next year.
- Now, the test will be if India can implement all its assurances in a time-bound manner.
- Or else, the latent anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh —, which has been revived after India's CAA - NRC push — threatens to damage Dhaka-New Delhi ties.



**APTI PLUS**  
Academy For Civil Services  
The Best IAS Academy in Eastern India SINCE 2008  
An ISO 9001 : 2008 Certified Institute  
*Creating Civil Servants for the Nation*



<https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33306/Joint+Statement+on+IndiaBangladesh+Virtual+Summit>

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/modi-hasina-virtual-summit-celebrating-bond/>