

India-Bangladesh Bilateral Relations

India and Bangladesh share bonds of history, language, culture, and multitude of other commonalities. The excellent bilateral ties reflect an all-encompassing partnership based on sovereignty, equality, trust, and understanding that goes far beyond a strategic partnership. The partnership has strengthened, matured and evolved as a model for bilateral relations for the entire region and beyond.

2. The year 2023 witnessed a spur of bilateral activities between both countries as an embodiment of the strength of the relationship. Both Prime Ministers jointly inaugurated the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline on 18 March in a virtual format. PM Sheikh Hasina also participated virtually in the Inaugural Session of the Voice of the Global South Summit on 11 January 2023 and the second Virtual Voice of the Global South Summit on 17 November 2023. As a Guest Country invited to India's G20 Presidency in 2023, Bangladesh participated under various tracks at Ministerial level including the former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen in G-20 Foreign Ministers Meeting and G-20 Development Ministers Meeting in March 2023 and June 2023 respectively.

3. EAM visited Dhaka on 11-12 May 2023 to participate in the 6th edition of the Indian Ocean Conference organized by India Foundation. During his visit, he called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited India from 8-10 September 2023 to attend the G20 Summit. Both Prime Ministers met on the sidelines of the Summit. Three MoUs in areas of digital payment mechanisms, cultural exchange and agricultural research were signed between the two countries during this visit.

4. Both Prime Ministers jointly inaugurated three Indian assisted development cooperation projects in Bangladesh on 1 November 2023 virtually. The projects are Akhaura-Agartala cross border rail link,

Khulna-Mongla Port rail line and Unit II of Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant.

5. The newly appointed Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud paid an official visit to India from 7-9 February 2024. This was his first bilateral official visit abroad after assuming charge as Bangladesh Foreign Minister in January 2024. During his visit, he called on Hon'ble President of India Smt. Droupadi Murmu and held bilateral meetings with EAM, NSA and Commerce and Industries Minister.

Security and Border Management:

6. There is active cooperation between various agencies of both countries working jointly to combat illicit drug trafficking, fake currency, human trafficking, and cooperate on police matters, anti-corruption activities, among others. Mechanisms for the peaceful and cooperative management of the 4,096 kms long international border are also actively focused on border fencing, joint inspection of boundary pillars, joint boundary demarcation, including of riverine boundaries, among others. Various bilateral mechanisms such as the DG Level talks between Border Guarding Forces, DG Level talks between nodal Drugs Control Agencies, including at working level, among other tracks are regularly held to discuss, exchange information and engage in better coordination.

Defence Cooperation:

7. In the defence sector, significant bilateral exchanges took place in 2023 with incoming and outgoing visits of the Chiefs of the Indian and Bangladesh Armed Forces. Bangladesh Chief of Army Staff visited New Delhi from 27-29 April 2023 and on his invitation, Chief of Staff, Indian Army paid a visit to Bangladesh in June 2023 as presiding officer for Passing Out Parade at Bangladesh Military Academy. The 5th Annual Defence Dialogue and 4th Tri-Services Talks were held from 20-21 August 2023 in Dhaka to comprehensively review ongoing defence cooperation. Bangladesh Chief of Naval Staff visited India from 12-15 September 2023 in series of exchanges under defence cooperation.

Connectivity:

8. Five pre-1965 rail links have been rehabilitated between India and Bangladesh. Haldibari (India) – Chilahati (Bangladesh) rail link was the fifth renovated rail line which has paved way for greater sub-regional connectivity. The other four rail links made operational between India and Bangladesh include Petrapole (India)-Benapole (Bangladesh), Gede (India) – Darshana (Bangladesh), Singhabad (India) - Rohanpur (Bangladesh), and Radhikapur (India) – Birol (Bangladesh). There are currently three railway trains operating between the two countries – Maitri Express (since 2008, connecting Kolkata and Dhaka); Bandhan Express (since 2017, connecting Kolkata and Khulna); and Mitali Express (since June 2022, between New Jalpaiguri and Dhaka).

9. India and Bangladesh have stepped up their cooperation in railways sector. The inauguration of Akhaura-Agartala cross-border rail link is a crucial step towards enhancing connectivity of northeastern India with Bangladesh. This is the first cross border rail link connecting northeastern India with Bangladesh. India is also invested in strengthening railway infrastructure of Bangladesh through Lines of Credit program.

10. Five bus services routes are currently operational between India and Bangladesh connecting cities of Kolkata, Agartala and Guwahati to Dhaka and further up to Khulna. For facilitating trade and transit between the two countries through the inland waterways, India and Bangladesh have a Protocol on Inland Waterways Trade and Transit (PIWTT) that has been operational since 1972. PIWTT permits movement of goods for inter-country trade as well as transit over barges/vessels through the river systems of India and Bangladesh. Cruise services between both countries through usage of PIWTT routes have also been operational.

11. Both countries have operationalized the Agreement for the usage of Chittagong and Mongla Ports in 2023. This will allow India to avail the services of these ports in Bangladesh for transit cargo between Northeast and mainland India. This will significantly reduce the cost and time of transportation.

Economic and Commercial:

12. Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and India is the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh in Asia. India is Bangladesh's largest export destination in Asia, with approx USD 2 billion of Bangladeshi exports to India in FY 2022-23. In FY 2022-23, the total bilateral trade has been reported as USD 15.9 billion.

Power and Energy:

13. Cooperation in power and energy sector has become one of the important pillars of India- Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh is currently importing 1160 MW of power from India. The Joint Working Group (JWG)/Joint Steering Committee (JSC) on Power provides an institutional framework to promote bilateral cooperation in cross border trade of electricity. The Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant has been made operational in supplying electricity to Bangladesh grid.

14. India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline between both countries for carriage of High Speed Diesel from India into Bangladesh was inaugurated by both Prime Ministers in March 2023. Further, ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL), in a consortium with Oil India Limited, is present in off-shore oil exploration. IOCL has also been registered as a G2G supplier in 2023 and is supplying POL products to Bangladesh.

Development Partnership:

15. Bangladesh is the largest development partner of India today. India has extended 4 Lines of Credits (LOC) to Bangladesh in the last 8 years amounting to around US\$ 8 billion for development of infrastructure in various sectors including roads, railways, shipping and ports. In addition to LOCs, the Government of 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.

16. High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) constitute an active pillar of India's development assistance. Human resource development is a key component of India's development cooperation efforts in Bangladesh through its several ongoing training programs and scholarships. The Government of India has been providing training to Bangladesh Civil Service officials, police officials, judicial officials and judges, professionals, among others, at various premier training institutes in India. The first Start Up delegation from Bangladesh visited India in May 2023 which was followed by a reciprocal visit from India to Bangladesh in July 2023.

Capacity Building and Human Resource Development:

17. An important ITEC partner country, Bangladesh annually sees around 800 participants availing benefits of the ITEC training courses. In March 2021, India announced 1000 "Suborno Jayanti Scholarships" for Bangladeshi students and in February 2022, a dedicated website was launched for desirous Bangladeshi students wanting to study in premier Govt of India educational institutes, including the IITs and NIITs, and pursue under-graduation, post-graduation and M.Phil/PhD courses.

Cultural Cooperation:

18. The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre and the Indian Cultural Centre in Dhaka both play an important role in celebration of common cultural links between the two countries. Its training programs including Yoga, Kathak, Manipuri dance, Hindi language, Hindustani classical music and the cultural programs of renowned artists of India and Bangladesh contribute in promotion of people-to-people contacts. As an important youth connect initiative, in June 2022, India launched a revamped version of the Bangladesh Youth Delegation 2022 campaign to attract the best of Bangladeshi talent, from various disciplines, to visit India as part of the delegation, for which auditions have been conducted in major cities of Dhaka, Chattogram and Rajshahi. A 100-member delegation visited India in October 2022, wherein they toured prominent sites of academic/cultural interest in New Delhi and other Indian cities, as well as called on Hon'ble President of India.
