

## **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.

2. The year 2020, despite onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, witnessed intense high level engagements at political and official levels beginning with the exchange of New Year greetings between Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 01 January 2020. Prime Minister Modi's participation in birth centenary celebrations of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through a video message on 17 March 2020 and his telephonic calls to PM Hasina on 29 April to convey the greetings on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan and to discuss the regional situation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and again on 25 May 2020 to convey the Eid greetings reflects the bond of friendship between the two countries.

3. The two Prime Ministers held a summit on a virtual platform on 17 December 2020 and discussed all aspects of bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international issues. On this occasion, both countries signed seven bilateral instruments in various sectors including hydrocarbons, agriculture, trade, development projects, and conservation of heritage. The two Prime Ministers also jointly unveiled a postal stamp issued by the Government of India to commemorate the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. On this occasion, two bilateral projects, Beautification and City Development Project in Rajshahi City and Construction of Khalishpur Collegiate Girl's School in Khulna were also inaugurated.

4. The External Affairs Minister (EAM) of India Dr S Jaishankar along with the Foreign Affairs Minister of Bangladesh Dr A K Abdul Momen co-chaired the Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) on a virtual platform on 29 September 2020 and the two Ministers jointly unveiled a commemorative postal stamp issued by the Government of Bangladesh on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The EAM also visited Dhaka in March, 2021. The visits of Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to Dhaka in March and August 2020 and the Foreign Office Consultations in New Delhi in January 2021 also energized the bilateral relations.

5. The exchanges in 2019 included that of the visit of the President of Bangladesh Md Abdul Hamid to New Delhi to attend the swearing-in ceremony of PM Modi and his cabinet members on 30 May 2019, official visit of PM Hasina to New Delhi on 03-06 October 2019 and to Kolkata to witness historic pink ball test cricket match between India and Bangladesh on 22 November 2019. In addition, the two Prime Ministers also met in a high level event on the sidelines of 74<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in September 2019 to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

6. In addition to the above high level engagements between the two countries, there have also been several interactions at senior official level 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:**

7. 51<sup>st</sup> Director General Level Talks (DGLT) between Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) were held on 22-26 December 2020 in Guwahati. In addition, border coordination conferences between Regional Commanders of BGB and the Frontier Inspectors General of BSF were also held regularly to discuss management and security of 4096.7 Km of the India-Bangladesh land border.

## **Defense Cooperation:**

8. High level exchanges in the year 2020 include the second edition of India-Bangladesh CORPAT 'Bangosagar' exercise on 03-05 October 2020, Regional Commanders meeting of Coast Guards on 19 October 2020, and the third Annual Defense Dialogue on 02 November 2020. The Indian Army has gifted trained horses and dogs to the Bangladesh Army in November 2020. The Indian Air Chief visited Bangladesh on an official visit in February 2021.

9. Muktijoddha related engagements and annual visit of Muktijoddhas on the occasion of Victory Day were undertaken in 2020 and scholarships will be distributed to the heirs of Muktijoddhas during January-March 2021. Additionally, Muktijoddha Medical Scheme was implemented for the first time in Bangladesh in 2020.

## **Connectivity:**

10. Both the governments are undertaking various measures to restore the pre-1965 rail links and other connectivity links that existed between India and Bangladesh. The two Prime Ministers jointly inaugurated the newly restored railway link between Chilahati (Bangladesh) and Haldibari (India) on 17 December 2020. To enhance people to people contacts, the frequency of two passenger trains, i.e., Maitree Express and Bandhan Express was increased from 4 days a week to 5 days a week and from one day a week to two days a week respectively from February 2020. Both countries also started using side-door container and parcel trains to maintain uninterrupted supply chains during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Government of India handed over 10 broad gauge diesel locomotives as part of grant assistance to Bangladesh Railways in a virtual event joined by External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and Railways Minister Piyush Goyal and their Bangladeshi counterparts Dr A K Abdul Momen and Md Nurul Islam Sujon on 27 July 2020. During the visit of PM Sheikh Hasina to New Delhi in October 2019, both the governments decided to commence Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka and Dhaka-Siliguri-Darjeeling-Dhaka bus service to enhance people to people contacts between both the countries and the trail run of Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka was also held in December 2019. Feni Bridge (Maitree Setu) connecting LCS Subroom (Tripura) and LCS Ramgarh (Bangladesh) has been jointly inaugurated on virtual platform by both the Prime Ministers on 09 March 2021.

11. Second addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) was signed in May 2020 for including two new India-Bangladesh Protocol Routes (Sonamura-Daudkandi on river Gomti and extension of Dhulia to Godagiri up to Aricha on river Padma), five new ports of call and two extended ports of call. Sonamura-Daudkandi Protocol Route was also operationalized in September 2020. Trial run of transshipment of Indian goods from Kolkata to Agartala via Chattogram was successfully conducted in July 2020.

### **Economic and Commercial:**

12. Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and India is the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh. Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has grown steadily over the last decade and the exports of Bangladesh have tripled over the last decade to cross \$1 bn in 2018-19. In the FY 2019-20, India's exports to Bangladesh were \$8.2 bn and imports were \$1.26 bn. Meetings of various institutional mechanisms to promote bilateral trade include that of Secretary level meetings of Commerce and shipping ministries, LCS/ICP infrastructure and establishment of Indian Economic Zone etc. In order to promote cooperation on bilateral trade, an India-Bangladesh CEO's Forum was launched in December 2020 to provide policy level inputs in various areas of trade and investment and also to facilitate exchanges among the business communities of both the countries. The first meeting of the India-Bangladesh Textile Industry Forum was held in February 2020 to enhance linkages and collaboration in the textile sector.

13. Cooperation in the power sector has become one of the hallmarks 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.

### **Development Partnership:**

14. 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, 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.

15. High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) constitute an active pillar of India's development assistance. The Government of India has funded 68 HICDPs including construction of student hostels, academic buildings, skill development and training institutes, cultural centers, and orphanages etc in Bangladesh and another 16 HICDPs are being implemented.

### **Capacity Building and Human Resource Development:**

16. 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 training 1800 Bangladesh Civil Service officials from 2019 at National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG), Mussoorie. Bangladeshi police officials are also being trained at various premier training institutes in India on various modern policing and new investigative techniques of this information age. Similarly, the Government of India has been extending training for 1500 Bangladeshi judicial officials since 2017 at National Judicial Academy, Bhopal and also at various State Judicial Academies in India. Bangladesh is also an important ITEC partner country and annually around 800 participants from Bangladesh avail the ITEC training courses. In addition, 200 scholarships are awarded by ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) every year to students from Bangladesh for pursuing under-graduation, post-graduation and M.Phil/PhD courses in educational institutes of India including the IITs and NIITs.

### **Cultural Cooperation**

17. The year 2021 will be historic in India-Bangladesh relations as both countries would be commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Liberation War and the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh. Both countries are making efforts to jointly organize several activities to commemorate these two epochal events in India, Bangladesh and in other countries.

18. The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) in Dhaka plays 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.

### **Visas:**

19. In pursuance of the policy of the Government of India to further liberalize Indian visa application process and to strengthen people to people contacts between India and Bangladesh, six new Indian Visa Application Centers (IVACs) were opened in Cumilla, Noakhali, Brahmanbaria, Sathkira, Thakurgaon and Bogura of Bangladesh in 2019 raising the total number of IVACs to 15. In 2019, the number of visas issued to Bangladeshi citizens crossed the mark of 16 lakh. Opening of two new Assistant High Commissions in Khulna and Sylhet in 2019 has also helped in facilitating an efficient and quick visa processing for Bangladeshi nationals. Both countries have commenced a temporary air travel bubble to facilitate the urgent requirements of travelers of India and Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Cooperation to tackle the challenge of COVID-19 pandemic:**

20. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina participated in the video conference of Leaders of SAARC countries on 15 March 2020 at the invitation of Prime Minister Modi to share assessments of the

current situation relating to this pandemic, consider best practices, and identify cooperative measures to minimize and mitigate the spread of the disease. As part of bilateral assistance, the Government of India has extended three tranches of medical assistance including 30,000 surgical masks, 15,000 head covers, 50,000 surgical latex gloves, 100,000 Hydroxychloroquine medicine tablets and RT-PCR test kits capable of running 30,000 tests in March- April 2020 to Bangladesh to assist in its efforts to fight against the COVID pandemic. The Government of India has also been conducting various online training modules to train the health professionals of Bangladesh on treatment and care of COVID patients.

21. In January 2021, the Government of India gifted 2 million Covishield (Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines) to Bangladesh to assist in its efforts to fight against the pandemic. The Government of Bangladesh, BEXIMCO Pharmaceuticals Limited of Bangladesh and the Serum Institute of India (SII) have signed a trilateral MOU to procure 3 crore doses of COVID-19 vaccine from the SII.

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