



Amending the Relations

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This article is based on **Friend in deed** which was published in the Indian Express on 08/03/2021. It talks about Bangladesh as a key partner to India in various fields and the recent areas of conflicts and cooperations between them.

For India, **Bangladesh** holds importance as a key partner in the **South Asian region** and in the **Indo-Pacific region**. It is also an important part of **India's Act East Policy** and **Neighbourhood First' policy**.

Despite the strategic significance and several areas of cooperation, a lot of conflicts persist between India and Bangladesh..

Maintaining ties with a country of such great importance becomes even more crucial when China is already asserting its dominance and intervening in India's relations with its neighbouring countries.

Recent Areas of Cooperation

- **Bilateral Ties:** The year 2021 marks the **50th year** of the establishment of bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh.
 - The Prime Minister of India will also be visiting the country for the **centenary celebrations of Father of the Nation**, Mujibur Rehman.
 - The Bangladesh Army contingent had also participated in the Republic Day 2021.
 - Moreover, India's commitment to remove non-tariff barriers has reset the positive course of bilateral ties.
- **Swarnim Vijay Varsh:** As part of the 'Swarnim Vijay Varsh' (50th year of independence), Indian Naval Ships are scheduled to make their first visit to the Mongla port in Bangladesh.
 - The indigenously developed **Sumedha** (Offshore Patrol vessel) and **Kulish** (guided missile corvette) will be heading to the port to commemorate the day.

- **Other Major Progress:** A trial run of container cargo has been conducted through Bangladesh's Chattogram (Chittagong) port to Agartala
Two new protocol routes to inland waterways have been added connecting Tripura with the national waterways through Bangladesh.
- **The Maitri Setu:** The PM of India will inaugurate 'Maitri Setu' bridge built over the Feni river which flows between the Indian boundary in Tripura and Bangladesh.
The name 'Maitri Setu' symbolizes growing bilateral relations and friendly ties between India and Bangladesh.
- **Train and Bus Routes:** In December 2020, rail connectivity between **Haldibari** in West Bengal and **Chilahati** in Bangladesh was resumed after almost 55 years.
The two countries are now working out the modalities to open up a bus route between **Dhaka** and **Siliguri** (WB).

Obstacles in the Relation

- **CAA and NRC:** An enormous reserve of goodwill for India exists in Bangladesh for historical, linguistic as well as cultural links.
However, a few recent courses of action such as the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** in Assam and **Citizenship Amendment Act** have casted shadow on the ties.
- **Water Disputes:** The issues shared resources of the two countries such as the waters of the river **Teesta** are taking too long to get resolved.
Sharing these waters with Bangladesh has been a long-pending promise by Delhi to Dhaka.
- **The China Aspect:** Currently, Bangladesh is an active partner of the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** that India has not signed up to.
 - In the security sector, Bangladesh is also a **major recipient of Chinese military inventory**, including submarines.
 - Moreover in 2020, China has promised to enhance support for Bangladesh's infrastructure projects as a "development partner".
 - Bangladesh had also sought a loan of about USD 1 billion from **China to develop the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project.**
- **Killing of Bangladeshi Nationals:** There have been increased incidents of killings of Bangladesh nationals in 2020. These incidents of killings were the highest within a decade.
Criminal activities are responsible for the killings along the India-Bangladesh border.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening Ties with the Developing Bangladesh:** Bangladesh is now basking in a new self-confidence because of its spectacular economic performance even during the pandemic.
 - Deepening relationship with Bangladesh has become a necessity in the face of shifting geo-economics.
 - The country, with its growing economic success provides a vital partnership in the region.
 - Moreover, India and Bangladesh share the fifth-longest land boundary in the world.
 - It is important for India to maintain a positive working relationship with Bangladesh to bolster security and border management.
- **Resolving the Water Issues:** The two countries share 54 transboundary rivers, and water management is the key to prosperity.
 - The Teesta project is important and urgent from India's point of view, so it is crucial to solve it as soon as possible.
 - India must implement all its assurances in a time-bound manner otherwise the latent anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh could threaten the friendly ties.
- **Minimising Chinese Influence:** With the ongoing India-China conflict, both of them seek to expand their influence in Bangladesh, but so far China has offered the best card to Bangladesh.
 - Bangladesh is in need of more foreign funds and assistance which it will accept either from India or China, it is India who must come forward and act first in order to counter China.
- **Other Possible Cooperations:** The area where the two countries can collaborate is the north east in the agricultural and agro-products sector. .
 - Agriculture has game-changing potential in terms of relations of the two countries.
 - Bilateral cooperation in this sector can pave the way to overcome the current economic challenges.

Conclusion

India has a stake in Bangladesh not only for the security of its eastern borders but also for other strategic advantages. Therefore, it cannot afford to let go of the recently achieved opportunity to break away from the past trajectory and establish new contours of engagement with Bangladesh.

The government needs to be constantly mindful of the significance of a good relationship with Bangladesh. Else, it may be all too easy to lose the moment and pave the way for China's inroads in the region.

Drishti Mains Question

Bangladesh is a “key partner” to India not only in South Asia but also in Indo-Pacific region. Analyse.
