

## India Bangladesh Relationship: Progress Made and Challenges Ahead

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### Abstract

*This study focuses on the relationship between India and Bangladesh in various domains and identifying the probable solutions to mitigate future challenges. It also focuses on cultural, social, and economic ties of Indo-Bangladesh relationships. It is descriptive in nature. Secondary data were used in this comparative study and information were collected from several ministries to get the updated information. This article will help both the countries to develop their economic, political and cultural ties in light of the recommendations stated at the end of the article.*

### Introduction:

India's relation with Bangladesh originated from the very beginning of civilization. Still now, both the countries retain cultural, social, and economic ties that are truly indispensable. India was a friend in need during the Bangladesh war of liberation. Though India's supremacy over Bangladesh is unquestionable in terms of all perspectives, the imperative of maintaining a cordial and congenial relationship is very critical for a number of valid reasons.

### Economic:

We can look at the bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh since the Independence of the latter in 1971. Immediately after the liberation, Bangladesh required consumer goods, especially food, which came from India. Soon after, Bangladesh also started opening up its economy and this led to the Indian exports to Bangladesh. The formal and informal exports of India grew because of the appreciation of the real Taka/Rupee exchange rate by about 50% between 1980 and 1999.

But, in fact, the nature of Indo-Bangladesh economic relation has created a trade deficit for Bangladesh and it has become a matter of great concern. From only 2.6% in 1980, it increased to as high as one-third of Bangladesh's total trade deficit. Recently some initiatives have been taken by India to reduce the huge trade imbalance. However, in the last few years, repeated mutual visits of bi-lateral co-operation in the wake of India's pledge to extend soft-term, lavish development assistance.

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During Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visit to Bangladesh in June 2015 India extended a US\$ 2 billion line of credit to Bangladesh and pledged US\$ 2 billion worth of investment. As per the agreements, India's reliance power agreed to invest US\$ 3 billion of to set up a 3,000 MW Liquefied natural gas (LNG)- based power plant (which is the single largest foreign investment ever made in Bangladesh) and Adani Power will be setting up 1600 MW coal-fire powered power plant at a cost of US\$ 2 billion.

Both countries have set up cross border market trade system in four points. It started in 2010 for 3 years. Both side agreed to extend the deal up to 5 years and the number of sellers were allowed to increase from 25 to 50. The transaction limit was raised from 100\$ to 200\$. They also decided to increase 6 more similar markets across various key points.

Recently Bangladesh cabinet has a revised trade deal with India under which the two nations will be able to use each other's land and water routes for sending goods to a third country, removing a long-standing barrier in regional trade. Under the deal India would also be able to send goods to Myanmar through Bangladesh.

### **Political:**

India and Bangladesh repose faith in democracy and more or less similar pattern of executive role of the government. The prime minister happens to be chief executive officer (CEO) and the being the figurative head and the beholder of the supreme command of the government. Both the nations have multi-political party system and huge turnout in elections does show people's faith in democracy. Due to the help in distress after the war of liberation, Indo-Bangladesh relation was usually harmonious.

India and Bangladesh are also engaged in regional cooperation through multilateral forum such as SAARC, BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Multi- Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and IOR-ARC (Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation) etc. In pursuance of directions of the Prime Ministers of both the countries, each side has also commenced implementation of sub-regional cooperation initiatives along with Nepal and Bhutan.

Bangladesh and India share a common history and their political leaders are familiar with each other's concerns and sensitivities. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina enjoys goodwill of India due to her persistent and sincere efforts to address New Delhi's vital security concerns. A number of ministers from the NDA government repeatedly acknowledged Bangladesh Governments full cooperation in tracking down religious extremists, anti-India insurgents and criminal elements. The Indian leaders have also expressed satisfaction over the prevailing warm ties between the two nations. President Pranab Mukherjee, who enjoys excellent rapport with the ruling Awami League, noted on November 19, 2015, that India attaches the highest importance to its relation with Bangladesh and their present bilateral relations with Bangladesh are the "best ever since 1974".

After a gap of 41 years, the Indian Parliaments finally ratified the LBA on May 7, 2015. Both the houses of the Parliament displayed rare unanimity in passing the Constitution (119th

Amendment Bill to settle the Lingering border dispute with Bangladesh. The LBA came into effect on July 31, 2015 delineating aspects of the operationalisation of the LBA was peaceful transfer of 162 enclaves- many of them were adversely possessed. India's Ministry of External Affairs described July 31 as a "historic day" for both India and Bangladesh. As it marks the resolution of a complex issue that has lingered since independence.

### **Cultural:**

The umbilical cord of India and Bangladesh happens to be the same as both these nations were integral parts of the Indian subcontinent. As a matter of fact, the undivided Bengal prior to 1905 was as indissoluble part of a single province (Bengal) in British India. Therefore there is hardly any scope to segregate the social heritage and culture of both the Bengals- Bengal and Bangladesh. The cunning administrators played the mischievous spoilsport to bifurcate the hurt of Bengalees forever. This is also one of the reasons why the identification of the infiltrators from Bangladesh to Bengal cannot be easily identified as the culture, language, physical traits, social habit, custom etc. are apparently very similar.

The contribution of undivided Bengal in the sphere of culture is memorable and praiseworthy that the Bengalees were always considered the most educated and cultural in the entire subcontinent. No wonder, the Bengalees (Rabindranath Tagore and Amartya Sen) won the coveted Nobel Prize. The Bengali cuisine contributed by Indian Bengal and Bangladesh happen to be the most sought after. Some mention may be made of:

*Sherpur's Chanar Payesh*

*Madaripurs Khejur Gur*

*Old Dhakas Bakar Khani*

*Tangails Chamcham*

*Chandpurs Hilsha*

*Meherpurs Rashkadam*

The glorious contribution of Rabindranath Tagore can never be forgotten as two of his famous songs were later adapted National Anthem of both these countries (1) Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka Jaya he (India), (2) Amar Sonar Bangla Ami Tomaye Bhalobashi (Bangladesh). Kazi Nazrul Islam, one of the greatest poets and lyricists is indeed the best emblem of the unity of India-Bangladesh cultural identity. He was born in Churulia in India (West Bengal) and later the Bangladesh Government invited him to reside in Dhaka permanently and was declared "The National Poet of Bangladesh". He passed away on 29 August 1976. Therefore, the significant cultural identity of the Bengalees should always be remembered with pride and the contribution of these two countries can never be separated from one another.

India and Bangladesh are bound by historical, religious, cultural, linguistic and kinship and people to people relations constitute a significant facet of the bilateral relations. Prime

Minister Modi highlighted this aspect during his Dhaka visit and it had gone down well with the people of Bangladesh. It has been estimated that the Indian Missions in the neighboring country issue nearly half a million visas every year for the Bangladeshis.

They visit India for medical service, education, pilgrimage, business, tourism and many other purposes. The number of Bangladeshi visitors has increased manifold over the years and New Delhi should attach priority to sort out the persisting visa-related problems for expanding people-to-people contacts. After all, the Bangladeshi visitors immensely contribute to the local economy of West Bengal.

The people of the two neighboring countries have a passion for literature, art and music. Therefore both the sides should enhance cultural exchange programmes and altercations at various levels for a better understanding of each other. New Delhi could consider Dhaka's demand to allow operation of more Bangladeshi television channels in India. Bangladesh is really doing well in the cultural arena and many of its programmes are popular in Indian states.

Special emphasis has been laid on promotion of Programme (CEP) 2009-2012 provides the framework for such exchanges to promote bilateral cultural exchanges, the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) of Indian Council for Cultural Relations was inaugurated at Dhaka on March 11, 2010. The joint inaugural ceremonies of 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore were held in Dhaka on 6 May and New Delhi on May 2011 and year-long celebrations were carried out and concluded.

India and Bangladesh have agreed to jointly produce a documentary on the 1971 War of Independence of Bangladesh. The decision was taken during the meeting between India's Minister for Information and Broadcasting M Venkaiah Naidu and his Bangladesh counterpart Hasanul Haq Inu in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Taking the friendly relation with Bangladesh ahead, Naidu said that the All India Radio (AIR) would be launching an exclusive service for Bangladesh and Bengali diasporas titled "Akashvani Maitree" on 23rd August 2016.

Both sides also agreed to jointly workout a proposal for a joint AV co-production agreement between the two countries. It was also agreed to organize Film Festival of India in Bangladesh and a Bangladesh Film Festival in India.

The Bangladesh minister also agreed to the request of Venkaiah Naidu to provide the celluloid version of the film 'Devdas' directed by Pramatesh Barua, the Bengali version produced in 1935.

Bangladesh had earlier provided the DVD version of the film to NFAI.

Regarding the facilitation of Free Film Trade between the two countries, Naidu mentioned that Bangladesh could consider to relax the legal provisions which restricted the number of Indian films in that country.

The easing of restrictions would have a positive impact on the local film industry. The minister also offered to train the young filmmakers and entrepreneurs from Bangladesh at

the Indian Film and Training Institutes.

He also mentioned that collaborative measures would be initiated between NFDC and Bangladesh Film Development Corporation to promote joint production of films and also between NFAI and Bangladesh Film Archives for digitization and archiving.

The ministers during their deliberations also agreed to promote capacity building and training workshops for media persons, exchange programme for officers associated with information and broadcasting and exchange of programmes between DD and its counterpart in Bangladesh.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

To better improve the Indo-Bangladesh relation both the countries should improve and standardize the customs at land ports and set up committee to monitor and disseminate key findings on bilateral initiatives, such as transit facilities, Rampal power plant etc. They should facilitate regional cooperation beyond economics to increase competitiveness as both India and Bangladesh fall behind in terms of per capita global trade. They should organize conferences to bring China, India and Bangladesh together to address some of the future challenges which will ultimately all concerned.

Bangladesh India- relations over the years reflect the prominence of coercive elements in India's hegemonic role in South Asia. This perception will affect the long term institutional relationships with smaller neighbors of South Asia. This was clearly reflected in India's aversion towards multilateral cooperation frameworks like SAARC and lack of cooperation with countries, as seen with Bangladesh.

The history of the formation of the European Union as a powerful regional bloc shows a greater compromise on the bigger parts like France and Germany to achieve regional cohesion and peaceful relations. India, too, should prepare itself to compromise on certain fronts if cohesion and peace is to be achieved.

If India wishes to continue its relationship with Bangladesh, it needs to take a good look at the stand it takes towards other south Asian countries also. A hegemonic stance by India would have significant impact on the Indo-Bangladesh relations.

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