

## DEBATE

### INDIA–BANGLADESH RELATIONS: SCALING NEWER HEIGHTS

The highly successful visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh, on 6–7 June 2015, has been commented upon positively – both in India and in Bangladesh. The 65 paragraph Joint Declaration<sup>1</sup> has set the path for the future course of relations between the two neighbours.

The conclusion of the long–pending Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) – passed unanimously earlier by both Houses of the Indian Parliament – which underscores the healthy practice of consensus in matters of national security and foreign policy, set the tone for the momentous visit. In fact, the Joint Statement (Para 12) noted that

Prime Minister Modi handed over to Prime Minister Hasina the video recording of the debate on this Bill in the Indian Parliament. ... Prime Minister Hasina appreciated the political parties and political leaders in India for the great demonstration of camaraderie in the unanimous adoption of the bill.

The announcement that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Bannerji would be present in Dhaka during the visit did lead to some speculation that an agreement on the Teesta was imminent; but this was soon scorched. However, the Joint Statement (Para 19) noted that the issue was raised, and that ‘Prime Minister Modi conveyed that deliberations were underway involving all stakeholders with regard to the conclusion of the Interim Agreements on sharing of waters of the Teesta and Feni as soon as possible’. Indeed, diverse comments from leaders (and commentators) on both sides do indicate that time has softened ‘reservations’, and the subject will now be addressed afresh.

Some significant ones among the 22 documents signed by the two countries were: the Agreement on Coastal Shipping between India and Bangladesh, the MoUs between the Coast Guards of India and Bangladesh on connectivity as well as on cooperation on ‘Blue Economy’. The latter are important from the strategic point of view.

An editorial comment in the Indian daily *The Hindu* noted that “The consensus–building across India [on the LBA] did not go unnoticed in Bangladesh”;<sup>2</sup> it also added that “the two key opponents of the *Awami League* – the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party – have also welcomed the visit and the deals respectively”. “Irreversible, Irrevocable Successes”<sup>3</sup> is how a serving Bangladeshi diplomat’s observation

characterised Prime Minister Modi's visit and the emerging Indo–Bangladesh bilateral relations. A Bangladeshi columnist, writing for the *Bangladesh Chronicle*, noted that “both the major parties in Bangladesh have come on board for friendly relations with India”.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, there seems to be a consensus in both India and Bangladesh towards taking the bilateral relationship to higher levels. An Indian commentator has even recommended that “Bangladesh's geostrategic location in India's eastern region requires sustained nurturing of bilateral ties, with India shouldering asymmetrical responsibilities.”<sup>5</sup>

How should India and Bangladesh build further on this visit? The yet unsolved issue of Teesta needs to be addressed. How can that be achieved? How should each of the accords be implemented and monitored? Would the internal political squabbles within Bangladesh lead to any hiccups? Are there any other pitfalls that could emerge?

These are some of the questions that were posed to some experts/strategic analysts from both sides of the border. Their views are published as the ‘Debate’ in this edition of the Journal.

(The views expressed by the authors are their own, and do not reflect the views of the *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, or that of the Association of Indian Diplomats)

The Journal had earlier published two debates on India–Bangladesh Relations, in December, 2011 and December 2013, which are respectively available at: <http://associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol6/6.4/DEBATE.pdf> <http://associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol8/8.4/DEBATE–BD.pdf>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?25346/Joint+Declaration+between+Banglades+and+India+during+Visit+of+Prime+Minister+of+India+to+Bangladesh+quot+Notun+Projonmo++Nayi+Dishaquot>.

The text is attached as an appendix to this debate.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/modis-day-in-dhaka/article7291974.ece>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://policywonks.in/commentary/irreversible-irrevocable-successes-in-india-bangladesh-relations>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bangladeshchronicle.net/index.php/2015/06/modis-visit-the-lba-and-the-berlin-wall/>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/modi-and-hasina-have-the-opportunity-to-strengthen-bilateral-ties/article1-1356414.aspx>.



## ***Indo–Bangladesh Relations: A Clear Paradigm Shift***

Deb Mukharji\*

The present debate on Indo–Bangladesh relations is the latest in a series started some years ago in this Journal<sup>1</sup>. The focus in earlier discussions was often on overcoming the lack of mutual understanding, as well as identifying areas of mutual cooperation and action. The terms of the current debate are anchored in Prime Minister Modi's visit to Dhaka in June 2015. There is general acceptance that substantive progress has been made in Indo–Bangladesh relations and the new government seems to be seeking a roadmap for the future, bearing in mind the 'pitfalls' that may lurk. The tone for a new phase in Indo–Bangladesh relations had first been set during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Delhi in January 2010, and sealed by the Framework Agreement on Cooperation and Development concluded in Dhaka by the two Prime Ministers in September 2011.

This is a remarkably happy state of affairs, considering that, not too long ago, the neighbouring state was seen to be actively supporting anti–Indian insurgency groups even as it adopted an attitude of benign indifference to the rise of Islamism which sought to change the very nature of the polity in Bangladesh, with obvious concomitant consequences for India. The change is the result of active understanding of India's security concerns by the government of Bangladesh.

Also, a favourable augury is the unanimity among political parties in India for strengthening bilateral ties with Bangladesh. It is significant that, for the first time, the main opposition party in Bangladesh – the Bangladesh Nationalist Party – has welcomed the Land Boundary Agreement, and expressed its appreciation to the Indian Parliament. Nor have there been any serious objection to the slew of agreements signed during Prime Minister Modi's visit. The media in both countries has also been supportive of the emerging ties between the two countries.

Prime Minister Modi's Dhaka visit and the agreements reached have increased the intensity and the tempo of Indo–Bangladesh bilateral relations that have been in evidence since 2010. The agreement on coastal shipping could be transformative for the region. Coastal shipping and the improvement of the waterways, bringing in Bhutan and Nepal for seamless transit, has enormous promise. Many have considered that the emergence of Bangladesh

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as a communications hub of the eastern region and beyond could offer it great economic advantages as well as enhance its geo-political importance. In fact, such a suggestion was made in a Track II Dialogue as far back as 2007. The decisions on maritime co-operation and the use of Bangladeshi ports have obvious and substantive possibilities for both countries. The Motor Vehicles Agreement concluded by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India in Thimpu also augurs well for the realisation of potentials .

The concept note to the debate asks an important question: How should each of the accords be implemented and monitored? This is a critical issue. In the past, time has been allowed to slip, as after Sheikh Hasina's visit in 2010, when little movement seemed visible. This would have led to disappointment in Bangladesh where people expected more than platitudes. The implementation of any agreement requires the involvement of multiple ministries and agencies. There has to be a single agency with the authority to co-ordinate. In the past, this has been the Ministry of External Affairs. This does not mean treading on the turfs of other agencies, but ensuring that deadlines are met. It is the MEA which should be answerable to the PMO for progress, and should have the freedom to seek PMO's intervention if there is perceived tardiness. MEA representatives must be present in all discussions in any agency with regard to implementation. It should be the coordinating and monitoring authority.

In making this suggestion one is not unmindful of the sanctity accorded to turf in the government. But if the PMO is serious about implementation, the MEA remains the best option. Besides coordination itself, actions – or inactions – in one segment impacts on other aspects of bilateral relations. That a common national objective is pursued should be the responsibility of the Ministry of External Affairs. It alone has the 'bandwidth' of understanding of co-related issues and consequences.

A question has been raised about the future of the agreement on Teesta waters. Clearly, as also acknowledged by all Indian commentators, Bangladesh has good reason to be disappointed. The issue is lying dormant now, but has the potential for mischief at any time. There was a strongly held view in South Block in 2011 that, under the rules of business, the central government could override the objections of the state government and sign the agreement – which had been negotiated with the knowledge and presumed approval of Kolkata. This course was not followed, and the agreement remains hostage to Kolkata's approval. It remains quite unclear if the blockage was due to genuine concerns about the loss to Paschim Banga, or resulted from a mix of ego, politics and management. This is an issue on which the central government will have to take a call. But also associated are broader principles of centre–

state relations. The government's desire to underline the federal nature of the polity is wholesome in principle. Equally, it has to be judged where the line is drawn. Else, our relations with Bangladesh could be held hostage to Kolkata (or the neighbouring north eastern states); Sri Lanka to Tamil Nadu; Pakistan to Punjab; and Nepal to Bihar and UP.

The concept note refers to the internal political situation in Bangladesh, and its possible effects on future Indo-Bangladesh relations. This is both an important and sensitive issue and has been touched upon in previous debates. Interstate relations are, by definition, between states and not between ruling political parties of the day. India – or Bangladesh – may have a greater comfort level with individual parties; but business has to be transacted with whoever is in power at a given point of time. The BNP may have expected that with its right and religion oriented image, it may find greater comfort with the BJP, with a similar orientation. The BJP may have been expected to be cool to the Awami League which has had a history of warm relations with the Congress. This did not happen, and the BJP has moved forward with admirable tenacity on the positives left behind by the Congress in its relations with Bangladesh, governed by the Awami League, thus underlining the broad consensus among Indian political parties in pursuing national interests.

Unlike in India, where despite the clamour and the dust, political parties do function within some democratic norms – chiefly the acceptance of electoral verdicts – the political scene in Bangladesh is, unfortunately, fraught with violence and rigidity of positions.

India's experience with BNP led governments in the past has not been beneficial. There is clear evidence of the BNP extending support to Indian insurgent groups, the Chittagong arms haul of April 2004 being the most glaring example. The then Minister of State for Home Affairs, the chief of the Jamaat e Islami as well as two former heads of intelligence have been sentenced to death for their complicity. That said, the BNP does remain a significant political force and may, at some future date, assume governance of Bangladesh. Statements recently emanating from the BNP display a positive attitude, and its chairperson, Khaleda Zia, has spoken of leaving the past behind. Note should be taken of such statements from a party presently in some disarray. But in interactions it should be made clear that India would tailor its reactions on ground responses and realities, as and when the occasion arises. Meanwhile, one can only hope that growing economic linkages with benefits to Bangladesh may help the BNP to overcome its ideological aversion to India. Economic bonds and connectivity may, in time, take India out of the internal political equations in Bangladesh.

As we look to the future, it is useful to recall some of the propositions and suggestions which had emanated from previous IFAJ debates. The Dhaka meeting in September 2011 was described as “a watershed between a transactional relationship and one of mutual confidence to achieve common goals”<sup>2</sup>. It was felt that, for harmonious forward movement, “coordination among numerous agencies involved is essential and, above all, continued political direction and involvement”<sup>3</sup>. It was commented that “Gen Next expects much more than just platitudes and hopes to see tangible results leading to visible benefits ... Bangladesh needs more than ever to feel the tangible gains that only a large neighbour like India can offer”<sup>4</sup>. Challenges to Indo–Bangladesh relations were seen, *inter alia*, to be in areas of river waters, trade, border management, illegal migration, and cross border terrorism. These would continue to require careful handling to prevent them from becoming stumbling blocks, or ‘pitfalls’ as described in the concept note.

River waters will continue to be an important factor in bilateral relations between the two countries. Rivers are critical to Bangladesh for a range of reasons – from navigation to ecology, agriculture and fishing. Almost all the rivers flowing into Bangladesh originate in India. There being no binding international law on the sharing of river waters, this would have to be decided upon through mutual consultations. Even after the Teesta issue is resolved, there would be many others which can cause problems. Both the agreement on the sharing of Ganga waters at Farakka and the ongoing Teesta discussions have been possible due to political directives. This cannot be expected to be the basis of future individual sharing arrangements.

The long term answer clearly lies in a holistic assessment of availability, and the requirements of basin countries. Tibet contributes about twenty per cent each to the flows of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. Chinese attitudes do not encourage optimism about their involvement; but serious dialogue is required among the others. Meanwhile, while always acting in good faith, we need to be careful about promising sharing arrangements which we may not be in a position to fulfil. A firm political hand would have to guide future discussions on water resources. The water resources experts in both countries are tuned to defending maximalist positions for their respective countries, and hence are unable to gauge what may be the pressing need of the other, and hence what compromises need to be made to create an acceptable middle ground. The decades lost in the Ganga and Teesta discussions testify to this, as also the moribund state of the Joint Rivers Commission.

Indo–Bangladesh trade has increased rapidly in recent years. Though there has been a steep increase in exports by Bangladesh following removal

of tariffs by India, the issues of the NTBs remain. Balanced trade between India and Bangladesh will never be a viable proposition, and nor should we at any level commit ourselves to reducing trade deficits. The two fold answer to reducing the deficit would be for Bangladesh to get service charges from India for transit by land, rivers or use of ports. The other possibility, with the additional advantage of creating economic linkages and inter-dependence, is for substantial Indian investment in the manufacturing sector in Bangladesh, thus facilitating greater exports to India as also, of course, to third countries. The Indian government can, and should, encourage investment; but the primary responsibility would be with Dhaka in making it possible.

Border management appears to be on a scale of improvement, with better coordination between the respective border forces. The Land Boundary Agreement has deleted the issue of enclaves where neither country exercises jurisdiction. But a tranquil border will not be achieved without eliminating the smuggling mafias that operate on either side. India is unable to permit export of cattle, for which there is huge demand in Bangladesh. This, together with vested interests in India for the 'export' of cattle, will continue to encourage smugglers. No clear resolution can be foreseen. Related to border management, the question of illegal migration from Bangladesh is a perennial issue. The logical approach, which has been suggested over decades, would be to issue work permits to Bangladeshi nationals seeking employment in India. Given the positive trends in the bilateral relationship, this could be discussed objectively.

A border related 'pitfall' is the killing of civilians at the border. This continues to be a deeply emotive issue in Bangladesh. Such deaths are acutely unfortunate, and should be avoided. Statistics would show that a fair number of smugglers shot are Indian nationals. The incident relating to the death of young Felani was shocking in the extreme. The tendency of the Bangladesh media to consider all those killed as innocent villagers is regrettable. Judging by the number of fatal incidents, the BSF has been exercising restraint. However, when attacked by armed smugglers, what they consider an appropriate response is inevitable. There are grey areas in the management of the border by the armed forces on both sides. Greater coordination and demonstrated determination to curb smuggling by forces on both sides would be desirable.

The concept note asks what the two countries need to do to build further on Prime Minister Modi's visit. The first, and obvious, requirement would be to ensure that the schemes/programmes decided upon are proceeding on track and on schedule. From the Indian side, the importance of the MEA as

the nodal agency has been mentioned earlier. To impart political supervision, there should be a ministerial level meeting every six months to monitor progress.

There has been a tendency for decisions/agreements to pile up awaiting a meeting at the highest political level. This is neither necessary nor desirable. It can delay action which may otherwise be taken in a more routine manner. Also, it puts undue pressure on the heads of government to be seen to be delivering. Meeting of HoGs should be far more frequent, and should not be treated as 'events'. India's record on this score has been poor until the advent of the BJP government in 2014.

There is a need to give frequent briefings to the media on positive developments as they occur. There is presently a positive interest on Bangladesh, and this needs to be actively utilized.

Track II discussions flourish best in a negative atmosphere: that is, when governments do not engage, or engage negatively, and civil society steps in to try and find solutions to issues to the mutual advantage of their respective nations. They are also an excellent vehicle for understanding the mood of the people, independent of inter-governmental relations. There had been a flurry of Track II engagements when Indo-Bangladesh relations were in the doldrums. It is interesting to observe that many of the recommendations of a major Track II initiative, made in 2007, have been reflected in inter-governmental decisions over the past few years. One must hope that more will be accepted. Meanwhile, Indo-Bangladesh Track II initiatives should continue to enable a deeper understanding of issues.

There has been a clear paradigm shift in Indo-Bangladesh relations over the past few years, as now exemplified and concretised by the agreements signed during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Dhaka in June 2015. As Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said some time ago, it is the season of friendship in Indo-Bangladesh relations. It remains now to build further on the foundation that has been laid.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol6/6.4/DEBATE.pdf> and <http://associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol8/8.4/DEBATE-BD.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol6/6.4/DEBATE.pdf>, p 378.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid* p 379.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid* p 406.



## ***Bangladesh–India Ties: Pragmatic Transformation***

Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty\*

The Land Boundary Agreement (LBA), finalized during the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh in June this year, justifiably received top billing in the media. So did the Teesta water sharing agreement which could not be signed, thanks to domestic politics in India. The LBA has been implemented, and enclaves, adverse possessions and demarcation of the land boundary was implemented on 1 August 2015 in a time-bound manner. A lingering ghost of the post-colonial era has finally been exorcised, freeing Bangladesh–India relations from the shackles of the past. The Teesta water sharing agreement, however, is enmeshed in political horse trading, as well as disagreement between the Central government and the West Bengal government on the water sharing formula. West Bengal believes that North Bengal will be deprived of its legitimate share of water, if the current formula for sharing is sanctified in the final agreement. Water is a State subject, like law and order. The Indian Constitution mandates that on water sharing, the Central government requires the concurrence of the States, though the Centre has full powers in the domain of external affairs for entering into treaties with foreign countries. However, different Central governments in India have, quite wisely, not tried to ram a water sharing agreement down the throat of a State government.

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Bangladesh produced a sheaf of bilateral agreements but left him with some heavy lifting to do on convincing West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Bannerji on the Teesta Draft agreement. One agreement which did not merit much media attention was the one which will connect India to the International Gateway in Bangladesh for voice, data and internet traffic for India's north-eastern states which have chronically suffered from indifferent and downright poor service in this important digital domain. An International Gateway is being established in Agartala. This will be connected to the Cox's Bazaar Cable Landing Station in Bangladesh, an International Gateway. When that becomes a reality, the north eastern states of India will get the extended bandwidth for internet traffic that they have been left without for so long. The cost of this project will be offset by better revenue generation for both sides. India's BSNL will lay the optical fibre cable network from

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Agartala in Tripura to Akhaura in Bangladesh to connect to the Bangladeshi network. This is huge gain for connectivity.

The future of Bangladesh–India ties and the eastern region of the sub-continent lie in creating a web of connectivity that integrate roads, railways, waterways and coastal shipping for the faster and easier transportation of goods. Connectivity remains the bedrock of a more efficient transportation infrastructure for India’s “Act East Policy” and bringing the north–eastern states into the mainstream of the Indian economy. Hence, Bangladesh and Myanmar are bridges to connect to India’s north–east and the ASEAN countries. India, therefore, has for long engaged Bangladesh for transit facilities to send goods and supplies to its north–eastern states in order to cut transportation costs as well as time. Bangladesh adamantly opposed transit to India for all these years. This opposition was bipartisan, and came from all shades of political opinion in Bangladesh. Denying transit to India seemed to unite most Bangladeshi politicians for quite a long time. It was somehow seen as a loss of sovereignty. While some transport companies in Bangladesh saw it as profitable business provided only Bangladeshi trucks were utilized, other businesses were concerned about losing markets in India’s north–eastern states for the limited range of manufactured goods that were produced in Bangladesh. Denial of transit to India served the purpose of leveraging bilateral ties for concessions from India on trade, mainly tariff reductions and removal of non–tariff barriers.

A game–changer in connectivity is on the horizon. The Bangabandhu multipurpose bridge, over the Padma (Ganga) will provide a much needed link between central and north eastern regions of Bangladesh as well as the south–west, cutting distances drastically. India has contributed funds to this project, including a grant element. The main contract was awarded in 2014 to a Chinese company, and the 6.4 kilometre long bridge will be completed in 2018. The existing multipurpose bridge over the river Jamuna (Brahmaputra) – also called ‘Bangabandhu’ Bridge’, already provides a transport corridor between central and northern Bangladesh. The Dhaka–Kolkata Maitri passenger train uses this bridge. The new bridge over the Padma will provide a new transport corridor, making, *inter alia*, the Dhaka–Kolkata journey much shorter. Once the Agartala–Akhaura rail link is established, then passenger and goods trains can run from Agartala via Dhaka to Kolkata. Once the railway is extended from Agartala to Sabroom in south Tripura, it would be possible to connect via Ramgarh to the Bangladeshi rail network and the port city of Chittagong. This will connect Chittagong to the Indian rail network which can then be used for importing goods for the north eastern states.

Bilateral ties have come a long way since then. India has conceded to Bangladesh duty-free and quota-free entry of Bangladeshi goods as part of India's market access policy towards all countries categorized as Least Developed (LDCs), except items on the negative/banned list. This has led to an increase in Bangladeshi exports; but currently, exports have dipped after stagnating for some time, and the trade imbalance continues to be unfavourable to Bangladesh. There is a structural problem in Bangladesh's economy which does not produce enough goods that can be exported to India because of the lack of a manufacturing base, competition and market conditions. To offset this growing trade imbalance, India has been generous in extending Lines of Credit (LoC) for infrastructure projects in Bangladesh. A special economic zone for Indian companies to invest in and set up manufacturing units for export to India and other countries is in the offing. Land has been identified for this purpose in Bangladesh. In return, Indian cargo ships will be able to use the Khulna and Chittagong ports. The MVA will help in transporting goods from Bhutan and Nepal to the Khulna port.

While SAARC has pushed for greater connectivity and economic integration, Pakistan has remained an outlier and spoiler. Pakistan's negative attitude has hobbled the development of SAARC as a healthy and vibrant regional organization. Pakistan has clearly decided that its future lies towards the West and North. It has, therefore, sought integration with China via the Economic Corridor for which China has promised US\$ 46 billion. With Afghanistan's future up for grabs, Pakistan's role in deciding its future political dispensation has been enhanced with the support of the USA and China. In the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), China has moved in thousands of workers to build tunnels and dams to provide Pakistan's chronically starved electricity grid. Pakistan has leveraged its geo-strategic location and its hostile posture towards India, to squeeze economic and military aid from both the USA and China. There is no incentive for Pakistan to change its policy towards India and SAARC. For Pakistan, the outcome of normal relations with India will undermine the interests of China and, to some extent, that of the USA, and will lead to Pakistan losing its privileged status with these two countries. Hence, Pakistan will not change course till such time its utility as a hostile countervailing force against India ensures the flow of benefits from China and the USA. Thus, countries of SAARC have to seek alternative avenues for cooperation.

As a result, other SAARC countries have found an alternative in the sub-regional BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) grouping and forged ahead, without waiting for other SAARC members to sign up to initiatives like

the MVA. At the 18th SAARC summit in Kathmandu, Prime Minister Modi articulated a vision of regional integration in South Asia that would go ahead “through SAARC or outside it, among all of us or some of us.” The Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) signed between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) is a tangible manifestation of this thinking. This is a welcome move as it will give a fillip to sub-regional cooperation within SAARC in the eastern region. The concept of sub-regional cooperation grew out of the many issues and challenges in a changing and globalized world, wherein terrorism, economic crises, migration, pandemics, etc. could be solved effectively through support and coordination among nations. Within the ASEAN, member countries – for instance, Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore – form an important grouping for sub-regional cooperation. Brunei-Indonesia - Malaysia-Philippines (BIMP) forms a second sub-regional group within ASEAN. These sub-regional groupings have successfully helped boost trade, and thereby contributed to tangible progress in these nations.

The BBIN initiative has its origins in the South Asia Growth Quadrilateral (SAGQ) which was conceived with some SAARC countries in mind, to finesse the India-Pakistan tension that had paralyzed SAARC. SAGQ sought to integrate local economies for the efficient utilization of resources, facilitated by geographical proximity. This idea led to the ADB promoted South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC), adding Maldives and Sri Lanka in 2001 to this grouping. The priority areas for cooperation were Transportation, Trade, Investment and private sector cooperation, with special emphasis on public-private partnership. The BBIN MVA is a step towards realizing this goal. South Asia is one of the fastest growing regions in the world. The SAARC countries, with 21 per cent (1.7 billion) of the world’s population, together constitute the 3rd largest contributor of global GDP, after the USA and China, in PPP terms. While South Asia is expected to grow, on an average over 6 per cent annually, the region remains one of the least integrated economically, in spite of SAFTA and the global trend towards regional trading organizations.

There are some positive trends on regional integration – for example electricity grids connectivity. The BBIN countries now have a common grid, with power flowing from India to Bangladesh and Nepal while Bhutan supplies power to India from the joint hydro-electric projects that have been constructed with Indian funding in Bhutan. Cooperation in the power sector can open up new opportunities for Bangladesh and Nepal. The hydro-electric potential of the sub-Himalayan region can be jointly exploited by the BBIN group, with each country facilitating wheeling of power through its territory. Together

with the MVA, this represents the initial building blocks of integration. Other integration issues in future could include joint BBIN investments in identified products, with duty free entry of these products to BBIN countries. It is imperative that India, as the largest country and economy, take the lead, shouldering asymmetric responsibilities in promoting and lead-managing these issues.

On the political and security fronts, there are some significant issues that will require close monitoring. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government has shown great courage by cooperating in addressing India's security concerns. Indian insurgent groups operating from Bangladesh under the patronage of Pakistan's ISI and its collaborators in Bangladesh, have been ousted from their camps. Their leaders have been arrested, and some handed over to India. It is a pity that some officials in the Bangladeshi security establishment are swayed by the Pakistan ISI into a negative mindset about India, and induced into adopting tactics that Pakistan used during the days of East Pakistan and continues to adopt on India's Western border to this day. Under Sheikh Hasina, the Bangladeshi security establishment has moved away from using these Pakistani-inspired tools, realizing the futility of these methods. Pakistan's current predicament, domestically and globally, for being a state that sponsors global terrorism and the blowback it has suffered as a consequence, must also carry lessons for all countries, including Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi Army and its intelligence wing, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) – originally modelled on the ISI of Pakistan by the former dictator General Zia-ur-Rahman – have changed and have become more professional, as also aligned with national objectives that believe that good relations with India are in Bangladesh's long term interest. The two Armies have developed good working relations.

However, China's influence is growing, with more than 80 per cent of the arms inventory of the Bangladesh defence forces being of Chinese origin. This, perforce, leads to droves of Bangladeshi defence personnel travelling to China for training, and the consequent exposure to Chinese influence and inducements. The recent decision to acquire two submarines from China has introduced a higher level of capability in the Bangladesh Navy. These are important developments that India has to factor in while considering policy options for Bangladesh. The residual problem of fake Indian foreign currency, pumped in by Pakistan via Bangladesh, continues. It is a challenge that has to be faced jointly by Bangladesh and India, as are other problems of smuggling of banned substances, and illegal migration of Bangladeshis into India.

The internal political landscape in Bangladesh is marred by the deep cleavage between the two main parties and their allies: the ruling Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The shadow of the last election in 2014 still hangs over the country. This election deepened the existing divide since the BNP, decided to boycott the election. The AL and its allies romped home without any resistance, gaining three fourths majority in Parliament. The BNP tried to mobilize Western countries in mounting pressure to cancel the election, and hold fresh election under a Caretaker government. It did not work because the election was not unconstitutional. India made it clear that it would support Sheikh Hasina, and this proved decisive in shoring up the Hasina government's confidence in deflecting international pressure which has since dissipated. Most countries have fallen back into the default position of dealing with the Hasina government.

The BNP has made strategic errors in its policy of confrontation at all costs, including sacrificing innocent lives in the violence unleashed by it and its principal ally and Pakistan proxy, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI). The JeI has been the storm troopers of the BNP on the streets. Sheikh Hasina's government has cracked down on street violence instigated by the BNP and Islamists cadres. The war crimes trials have also helped in caging the JeI whose leaders have been arraigned, convicted and sentenced to death. Currently, a notorious BNP war criminal and a well known Pakistani stooge, has been sentenced to death and awaits execution. Sheikh Hasina is determined to bring the war criminals to justice, and her policy enjoys widespread support on this issue. The BNP has softened its stance by saying that it would be ready to take part in an election under a neutral government. There is no longer the stubborn insistence on election under a Caretaker government, a provision that has been expunged from the Bangladesh Constitution via a constitutional amendment. The BNP may also be realizing that there are inevitable consequences for aligning with Pakistani objectives in dealing with India. While India's stated policy is quite unambiguous that it will deal with any government in power in Dhaka, it will not hesitate to support a friendly government in Dhaka (with which it has overlapping interests) or to impose costs for the anti-India activities of political parties in Bangladesh.

Other issues that are potentially difficult to handle and have the potential to undermine trust and confidence between Bangladesh and India are illegal migration, religious extremism, and the illegal cattle trade. Four Bangladeshi bloggers have been brutally hacked and killed this year. Disturbingly, three of them were Hindus from the minority community that has been under constant pressure of harassment and discrimination. While Pakistan has more or less

reduced the minority Hindu community to third class citizens as a matter of state policy under its policy of Islamisation which institutionalizes and legitimizes discrimination in an Islamic state, the situation in Bangladesh is relatively less grim. Yet, the proportion of the Hindu population has declined over the years – from about 27 per cent at the time of Partition to around 7–8 per cent now. India has absorbed most of the Hindu migrants from Bangladesh, and has no choice to continue to do so because they flee from persecution. The illegal Muslim migrants are, however, economic migrants, and cannot be treated at par with the Hindu migrants. Hence, India must develop a refugee policy which is distinct from a migration policy. Bangladesh is a net exporter of people. More than 8 million Bangladeshis have migrated abroad. The push factors are many: high population density, lack of land, poverty, chronic unemployment, and a thriving human trafficking mafia that trades in poverty and human misery.

The cattle trade is another mafia-controlled business that poses an intractable problem for bilateral relations. With the NDA government in power in India, it seems impossible that the cattle trade can be dealt with without religious sentiment in India becoming inflamed. The Islamists in Bangladesh are lying low, and making their presence felt by murdering atheist bloggers. The JeI has condemned the murders, and positioned itself in the moderate Islamist space. The JeI has political ambitions to take its place as a moderate Islamic Party in the political landscape of Bangladesh, and is biding its time to overcome the challenge of their older leadership who stand accused of war crimes. The role of countries in the Gulf in promoting and funding an extremist and intolerant version of Islam is a cause for concern for both countries. In Bangladesh today, there is more public display of Islamism, with more women wearing the hijab and burkha and influencing the younger generation towards greater religiosity. The Islamists have also changed tactics, and are resorting to “Dawah” quietly through motivated cadres. Politically, however, visible signs of Arabisation and Islamisation can be seen as symbolic gestures, exploiting religion for political gain, crass opportunism, and are plainly hypocritical. Culturally, the Bangladeshis have usually resisted this Islamisation through their passionate embrace of secular Bengali cultural mores like “Poila Boishak”.

The Sheikh Hasina government is going to stay for its full term till 2019. All major countries have reconciled to this reality which is seeping into the beleaguered BNP, currently battling isolation, as well as the pressures of fighting numerous legal battles and desertions. Many BNP leaders and members are fleeing the party, and seeking a truce with the AL-led government. Begum

Khaleda Zia is also embroiled in many legal cases of corruption. The opposition has been weakened considerably. What this means for the growth of a healthy democracy in Bangladesh is anyone's guess. For India, however, Sheikh Hasina's government is stable, and willing to make progress on bilateral issues. Prime Ministers Hasina and Modi have four years overlapping tenure, till the next election that could change the course of history in South Asia.

Prime Minister Modi tweeted before leaving Bangladesh: "Thank you Bangladesh. The visit will remain forever etched in my memory. Outcomes of the visit will lead to a stronger partnership". Indeed, one hopes they will.

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## ***India–Bangladesh Relations: Moving towards Greater Synergy***

Smruti S Pattanaik\*

The upward swing in the India Bangladesh relations has received a further boost with the historic ratification of the land boundary agreement by the Indian Parliament, followed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka. After the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government assumed power in May 2014, it has been piloting a "neighbourhood first" policy. Instead of just paying lip service to India's neighbourhood, Prime Minister Modi himself has taken keen interest to see that top priority is accorded to India's immediate neighbours to reinvigorate India's historical and socio-cultural ties and to restore the economic and trade linkages that existed before partition. The invitation to the heads of the governments of the SAARC countries for the swearing-in ceremony in May 2014 provided a glimpse into the NDA government's vision for the neighbourhood. In this context, the India-Bangladesh relations hold the promise of a new future. What one witnesses now is a culmination of a process that started in 2007 after the exit of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government and it would be worthwhile to trace developments since then.

### **The Beginning of a New Era**

The military backed caretaker regime that assumed power in January 2007, took steps to publicly recognise India's contribution to the liberation of Bangladesh and decided to felicitate Indian soldiers by inviting them to participate in the victory day celebration in Dhaka in 2007, which was the first of its kind. It needs to be mentioned here that India's role in the liberation war was politicised by vested interests. The two major political parties, the Awami League (AL) and the BNP attempted to appropriate history in a manner to glorify the role of only the founding father of their respective parties. Moreover, the subsequent military regimes that assumed power highlighted the role of the military and dismissed India's role as "strategically motivated". Therefore, this recognition by the military paved the way for a broader recognition, and coming from the military this was not questioned or frowned upon by the vested interests that had once collaborated with the military regimes. After AL assumed power in January 2009, it took

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further steps to recognise all those who contributed to the liberation of the country across the world. Both the countries now jointly celebrate Victory day in Dhaka and Kolkata.

During the Awami League's period, Prime Minister Hasina visited India in 2010 and a 51 point MoU was agreed upon, which provided a road map of future cooperation. Both the countries agreed to take steps at the earliest to demarcate the boundary, exchange the enclaves and settle the land that are in "adverse possession" of the other due to the rivers changing their course. While the strip maps were signed in July 2011, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed the protocol to the 1974 Land boundary Agreement during his visit in September 2011. An agreement on the Teesta could not be concluded; as a result, this issue shadowed the otherwise successful visit of the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

India announced a credit line of \$ 1 Billion during Prime Minister Singh's visit, out of which \$ 200 Million were converted to grant, to build railways, communications, and infrastructure. Both the countries have already successfully connected their electricity grids and have built new transmission lines as the two countries enter into a new phase of relations by instituting energy trade. 500 MW power is supplied to Bangladesh out of which 250 MW is provided at a commercial rate. Similarly, Dhaka allowed India to transport Over Dimensional Cargoes for the Palatana project in Tripura through its territory, even though it could not conclude a transit agreement with India - due to political difficulties falling out of India's inability to sign the Teesta agreement.

The most significant aspect of the bilateral cooperation was when Dhaka handed over the insurgents from the Northeast of India who had taken shelter in Bangladesh and emerged as a major stakeholder of peace in the north eastern region.

In this background Prime Minister Modi's visit on 6 – 7 June was significant for a number of reasons. First, India's delivery deficit to some extent was addressed through the ratification of the LBA and this paved the way for exchange of enclaves, which was duly accomplished on 31 July 2015; second, his announcement of buses and new trains invigorated the connectivity network that India is trying to build. Third, giving a boost to further economic engagement, India announced another \$2 billion credit line. Fourth, his address at the Dhaka University like his predecessor gave him an opportunity to connect beyond the political class to the civil society. Fifth, his meeting with the BNP leader was equally significant as India continues with its effort to develop a working relationship with the entire spectrum of the

political class and ideologies except for the Jamaat Islami, which is antithetical to India's core value of pluralism and secularism.

### **Reinvigoration of Bilateral Relations: Prime Minister Modi's Visit**

Prior to the visit of Prime Minister Modi, the government made an effort to bring all the stakeholders on board for the ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement. Support of the opposition was crucial as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) does not have majority in Rajya Sabha and the agreement needed endorsement by 2/3 majority. Prime Minister Modi described the Indo-Bangladesh land boundary agreement as a "meeting of hearts" and not just exchange of land. The land boundary agreement was often referred to as India's lack of commitment to honour an agreement it signed in 1974. Accordingly, after the exchange of instrument of ratification, 75 teams and 30 observers from the two countries worked round the clock from 6 to 16 July to ascertain the view of exchange dwellers regarding their choice of citizenship. On the mid-night of 31 July, the exchange of enclaves was concluded nearly 70 years after partition. Interim strip maps were prepared by both the sides on land under adverse possession as well as demarcation of border and were exchanged in June this year. Demarcation of 6.5 kilometres of the border on the ground will be completed in July 2016.

Connectivity has been a key aspect of India's neighbourhood policy. While effort is made to convert meter gauge to broad gauge since 2011, the NDA government signed two more agreements for a Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati bus service and Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala bus service. Prime Minister Modi, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina jointly flagged off the services of these buses in Dhaka. The Kolkata-Dhaka and Dhaka-Agartala buses are already operational. There is also the Moitree Express that runs between Dhaka and Kolkata through Gede. Both the countries have initiated coastal shipping between Chittagong and Vishakhapatnam. Some more initiatives to link other ports of India can be envisaged for the future.

Security has been a key aspect of the India-Bangladesh cooperation in recent times. Such cooperation has contributed to creating goodwill. It can be recalled that the previous BNP government sheltered leaders of Indian insurgent groups and was unwilling to acknowledge their presence. This insensitive and unsympathetic attitude towards India's security needs seriously undermined India's relations with Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina, after assuming power in January 2009, reversed this trend. She not only handed over the leaders of the insurgent groups but also declared that her government had "zero

tolerance” for terrorism. India’s concerns regarding terrorism find a resonance in Dhaka this time around. From time to time Dhaka has taken action against those who are involved in fake Indian currency rackets and arrested Lashkar-e-Toiba operatives whose target has been India.<sup>1</sup> It went to the extent of expelling a Pakistani High Commission visa officer this year for his links with the banned Hizbul Tahrir and his links with the fake Indian currency racket. Bangladesh itself has been a victim of terrorism and in the past has seen country wide bomb blasts in 2005 followed by suicide bombings. The attack on Shiekh Hasina in August 2004 in which some top leaders of AL were killed only reminded Prime Minister Hasina of the threat such elements pose to Bangladesh. The government has taken significant action against the Jamaatul Mujahedein Bangladesh (JMB) and the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) after it was elected. Facing the heat in Bangladesh; the JMB had regrouped in Burdwan. The cell was managed by Bangladeshi nationals with the help of Indian collaborators and was discovered following the accidental blasts in the bomb making unit; the National Investigating Agency (NIA), which is investigating the incident shared details with Bangladesh leading to the arrest of several key operatives in Bangladesh that are linked to the Burdwan blast. Such cooperation reflects the synergy that exists between the two countries at the political level. The Burdwan incident has also made it clear that a unilateral fight against terrorism within a country’s geographical boundary is not sufficient and that joint effort is essential to fight the menace given the porous border and socio-cultural affinity that helps the terrorists to find shelter and empathy and avoid action in their home countries.

### **Border Management Remains a Key**

India has emphasised joint border management. During Prime Minister Modi’s visit, the two countries signed MOUs on Prevention of Smuggling of Fake Currency Notes, Cooperation between Coast Guards and Prevention of Human Trafficking. They also emphasised, “...effective implementation of the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) for better border management so as to prevent cross border criminal activities, irregular movement, incidents of violence and tragic loss of lives”. The two countries had signed the CBMP in 2011 and India had assured that it would implement zero killing on the border. Reacting to the border killing the BGB Director General Major General Aziz Ahmed had said, “Crime is the cause of illegal trespassing. Border killings will decrease if we can curb the rate of crime in the borders”. The Bangladeshi media should be highlighting the criminal-smuggler nexus in the border region and the need to curb these activities, but it has preferred to highlight that Bangladeshis are being killed by the BSF in the border. Though a joint patrol

by the two border guarding forces has been put in place, the deaths on the border have only reduced and not stopped given the border dynamics. For example: India imposes night curfew on the Indian side of the border whereas there is no such measure on the Bangladesh side, which would prevent its nationals from approaching the border at night. The border, moreover, has become a hub of illegal activities like drug and human trafficking; and cattle smuggling constituting the single largest smuggling activity. Both the countries already have Home Secretary level talks to address human trafficking. Plugging of the vulnerable areas that are used by the traffickers would be vital along with improving border vigil. India and Bangladesh have finalised “Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for allowing usage of Indian border roads for construction and maintenance of Border Out Posts (BOPs) of Border Guards Bangladesh” during the prime minister’s visit. India has also agreed to allow the use of Indian medical facilities in difficult border areas by Bangladeshi personnel deployed in the vicinity. This would contribute to confidence building between the two border guarding forces. The border guarding forces since 2014 are also attending combined training courses – 41 members of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) including 25 officers attended a 10–day Border Control Management Course (BCMC) in December at Border Guard Training Centre and School at Satkania of Chittagong.<sup>2</sup> Earlier, on 15 April, BGB personnel attended a training course on border management at the Tekanpur BSF Academy. Such initiatives help the two border guarding forces to develop a joint approach to deal with the illegal activities in the border region and help in injecting a greater synergy. India has proposed joint training of the border guarding forces. To enhance the capacity of the border guarding forces, Bangladesh has established new Border Out Posts (BoPs). India agreed to help the BGB to procure construction material from the Indian side in areas where procuring them from the Bangladesh side is difficult due to the terrain.

In an effort to revitalise the border area cooperation, the two countries have revived the District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioners meet after many years, for better management of the borders and other local issues that fall within the purview of law and order and need immediate attention. These meetings take place between the border areas DM/DCs at a regular interval of six months. Such meetings now include the superintendents of police of the border districts of India and Bangladesh. Such an initiative, at present is confined to the Tripura and Bangladeshi districts adjoining the border, but it needs to be expanded to other states like Mizoram, Meghalaya and Assam to enhance better management of the border and foster understanding between the people living in the border region. West Bengal has already started holding DM/DC meetings. The Border Area Development plan, instituted by the Home

Ministry requires local indulgence. Involving DM/DCs would be significant to resolve local issues and 32 border districts have been instructed to hold regular border conferences.

In the last few years, border haats have been established to enhance trade of goods between border populations to meet local needs. This is significant as the border region is far from the district headquarters and remains marginal to development. There is a history of interdependence between the people of the bordering region given their ethnic affinity and thus cultural similarities. Moreover, smuggling of small quantities of food items is normal. With the fencing of the area people often resorted to smuggling as a source of income. The border haat provision allows 21 types of products that can be sold at designated border haats in a limited quantity. It consists mostly of agricultural produce as well as local products that are typical to that area. Out of the 12 proposed border haats, 4 haats are already operational – two in Meghalaya, one in Mizoram and one in Tripura.

### **Energy Trade**

During Prime Minister's Modi's visit, steps were taken to engage Indian private sectors in generating power to help Bangladesh achieve its 2021 target of electricity generation. Effort is being made to increase the Bheramara–Baharampur grid inter-connection from 500 MW to 1,000 MW. Bangladesh has proposed additional power import from India in a phased manner through construction of an additional grid interconnection on the western side of Bangladesh, and India has agreed to look into the proposal. Power evacuation from the North East region (Rangia/Rowta) to Muzaffarnagar of India is again significant. This  $\pm 800$  KV, 7000 MW HVDC multi-terminal bi-pole DC grid line is going to pass through Bangladesh. India has proposed suitable power tapping points at Barapukuria in Bangladesh so that Bangladesh can benefit from this transmission line. India has also agreed to construct the Ramphal power project. Mongla and Bheramara are proposed as sites for two Indian Special Economic Zones (SEZ). Indian companies – the Reliance Group's proposed LNG power plant and Adani Industries' proposed coal fire power plant are soon going to be set up with an investment of around US \$5.5 billion.

The two countries have established a India–Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) at the foreign minister's level to discuss trade and investment, security, connectivity, border management, water, power, shipping, renewable energy, development cooperation, art and culture, people to people exchanges, and human resource development. The Joint River Commission

(JRC) has been revived to look into water sharing issues between the two countries. Both the countries have now graduated to joint basin management.

India and Bangladesh are trying to take their relationship beyond bilateral engagement. This was evident from the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) countries' decision to go ahead with the Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic, which assumes significance in the sub-regional context. This agreement was signed in July 2015 to augment the cooperation that is extant. Bangladesh had earlier expressed its interest in importing electricity from Nepal and Bhutan. India is a major stakeholder in Bhutan in terms of its investment in the power sector. Similarly, Bangladesh has extended the usage of Chittagong and Mongla to India, Nepal and Bhutan thereby enhancing bilateral synergy through multilateral arrangements. The JWG on Water Resources Management and Power/ Hydropower discussed the scope for power trade and inter-grid connectivity between the four countries. All these efforts will augment bilateral relations and revolutionise sub-regional cooperation that has generally been a victim to mistrust and suspicion.

It needs to be emphasised that the two countries at present share cooperative bilateral relations and there is a great degree of mutual understanding regarding the mutual aspirations. India's Development Partnership Agreement with Bangladesh in 2011, underpins economic aspirations of the two countries away from the security centric approach that had once governed the bilateral relations. Though the Teesta issue appears to be the stumbling block at this moment, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's assurance on the Teesta issue is likely to pave the way for future resolution perhaps after the State Assembly poll. Unlike the past, India has a willing partner in Bangladesh that is not hesitant to engage its bigger neighbours in a mutually beneficial relationship and appreciative of the fact that their common future lies in greater cooperation. India needs to grab this opportunity and ensure that this relationship benefits Bangladesh as a true partner that dared to dream of a common destiny with a large neighbour. This is also an opportunity for India to engage in a mutually beneficial relation that has the potential to turn a new corner.

## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> Another Lashkar man held in Dhaka", *The Hindu*, 1 April 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/another-lashkar-man-held-in-dhaka/article393128.ece>

<sup>2</sup> See more at: <http://english.thereport24.com/article/16857/index.html#sthash.Y6kDuelw.dpuf>.



## ***‘All-Time High’ Relations Herald Greater Regional Integration***

Sreeradha Datta\*

India-Bangladesh relations are at an all-time high. The two Prime Ministers, Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina, appeared to have struck the right chords. While the focus continues to be on the bilateral agenda, the two neighbours have chalked out a path that will also lead to greater regional integration as well as complement and strengthen the bilateral process that has been set to roll.

The template for the improvement of bilateral ties between the neighbours was really laid with the Joint communiqué of 2010 which paved the way forwards for the two neighbours in ways quite un-heralded in the past. Indeed, with the coming of the Awami League government in December 2008, the promise of shared prosperity became the cornerstone of Indo-Bangladeshi bilateral ties. Bangladesh’s willingness to address India’s security concerns immediately signalled a friendly government in Dhaka. New Delhi also reciprocated by finding ways to address some of Bangladesh’s long standing demands. Its readiness to re-examine trade barriers, its willingness to examine other irritants that Bangladesh always complained about reflected an understanding India. One Bangladeshi commentator said,

There has been a critical shift from paired reciprocity - i.e. exchange of individual benefits – to more comprehensive or holistic approach to cooperation. The new approach takes a broad based and long term view of cooperation which produces synergy.<sup>1</sup>

This working model made further headway with the very successful visit of Indian Prime Minister Modi to Bangladesh in June 2015. India took a leap forward and promised Bangladesh a New Line of Credit (LoC) of US\$ 2 billion - doubling the previous \$ 1 billion credit line, offered in 2010. This indeed is the largest credit loan that India has offered to any state in the neighbourhood, or elsewhere. The visit also resulted in the signing of 22 Agreements, including one each on curbing of human trafficking, smuggling of fake currency, and setting up an Indian Economic Zone. The two states have signed a total of 87 agreements, memorandums of understanding, and protocols.<sup>2</sup> The most welcome and much awaited of all the Agreements signed during Modi’s visit was the one on the Land Boundary Agreement. The bill

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operationalised the exchange of 161 enclaves between the two countries.

In the backdrop of such positive bilateral developments, what shape will Indo–Bangladeshi bilateral ties take in coming years? There are a few factors that both the countries need to watch out for. Firstly, there is the matter of regime compatibility. As is well known, given the history of the Bangladesh War of Liberation, the Awami League party in Bangladesh and the Congress party in India have always shared close ties, with the bilateral relations always reflecting this in the last four decades. While typically a non-Congress government in Delhi has not substantially affected these bilateral relations, non-Awami League governments in Dhaka have. No doubt the history of domestic issues as well as contemporary developments always impacts the foreign policy of any country. Similarly, bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh have often been impacted by their respective domestic policies.

Thus, the issue of regime compatibility continues to haunt the two neighbours. The perceived closeness of India with one political party has become an inherited baggage for both India and the Awami League. Given the sharp political polarisation within Bangladesh, there is always a substantial population that continues to support the opposition. And, India's working relations with previous non-Awami governments have not been very smooth. India is certainly working within the framework of assuring the common Bangladeshis the tangibles that India offers. As the argument goes, once the positive developments trickle down to the ground, there will be limited scope for any government in Dhaka or Delhi to overturn them. However, given the slow pace of progress - even if we keep in mind the several large infrastructure projects involved which will necessarily take time - the only tangible takeaway in the last five years for Bangladesh will be the trade in energy. Presently, 500 MW of electricity is being traded, with plans for the transmission of over 1500 MW post the completion of the Palatana project and the building of another grid substation near the existing one. This is apart from the other projects being discussed. India has to move away from being associated with only one political party in Bangladesh. While in recent times Bangladeshi opposition leaders have voiced their support to working with India, past experiences have not been very encouraging. India needs a way out of the catch 22 situation. Timely tangibles clearly are a way forward.

Secondly, there are many security concerns. As is well known, addressing its security concerns has always been India's core demand from Bangladesh. Undoubtedly, the last five years have witnessed India and Bangladesh covering large grounds in this area with mutual trust and sincerity that the neighbours have not known for many years. In 2010, both sides had underscored the

need to actively cooperate on security issues, with an assurance that the territory of either would not be allowed for activities inimical to the other. Immediately after coming to power, the Sheikh Hasina government reopened the Chittagong arms haul case (2004),<sup>3</sup> and arrested the former National Security Intelligence Chiefs Major General (Retd.) Rezaqul Haider Chowdhury and Brigadier General (Retd.) Abdur Rahim, who were involved in the case. This sent the right signals to India. With the confessional statements of Mohammad Hafizur Rahman and Din Mohammad, the linkages between Bangladesh security agencies and Indian militants have been proved beyond any doubt.<sup>4</sup> Several of the India's north-eastern insurgents operating camps within Bangladesh for years were forced to fold up.

Political violence has always been a bane for Bangladesh. But, of late, there has been a drastic deterioration of law and order within Bangladesh. In addition, there is a distinct unhappy occurrence of fundamentalists setting the agenda against the secular sections of society. Five bloggers have been attacked in Bangladesh since 2013 - four of them since February 2015. A section of the Al-Qaida has claimed responsibility for the death of one such blogger. The radical group Ansar Bangla Team is another name that props up. Several militant organisations are trying to take advantage of the prevailing milieu, forcing the government to arrest five bloggers for allegedly hurting the religious feelings of Muslims.<sup>5</sup> In the context of recent terror attacks in Bangladesh, the picture that emerges is that 'Islamist militant groups in Bangladesh are showing signs of revival...and operational responses alone are proving inadequate.'<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the fundamentalist groups have been emboldened, and statements by security personnel have not helped the cause of the secularists in Bangladesh very much.<sup>7</sup>

While, unlike in the past, Indian insurgents may not be physically holed up in Bangladesh now, the deepening concern is the evidence of terror groups and their ability to cross borders. In other words, the possibility of them creating mayhem can never be ruled out. Reports of attacks on minorities in Bangladesh continue to flood the media. India has not shown any overt concern for the developments; however, the inability of Bangladesh to address the rise of Islamist violence is bound to spill over into India, with the possibility of the horrors of 2001 and its subsequent years getting relived once again.

The third issue of some concern is the high level of expectations between the two countries. The two sides have a history of disenchantment and, given the high expectations from the successful high level visits between the two neighbours, the possibility of delivering less than promised is inevitable in the South Asian scenario. The paeans that have been sung in Bangladesh for the

Indian political leadership post Prime Minister Modi's visit to Bangladesh is not a very common phenomenon. Indeed, in the words of a Bangladeshi editor,

Our welcome to the Indian PM was practically with no holds barred. The government left no stone unturned. All political parties literally fell head over heels to meet Modi. BNP and Jamaat went public to say how they were never anti-Indian in their policies. The media went all out with full, uncritical and extensive coverage of the Indian Prime Minister's maiden visit. In fact, this paper itself went much further than it did ever before.<sup>8</sup>

While this may be true, it is also apparent that, in the same breath, Bangladesh is also saying,

It is now India's time to reciprocate. It is now Narendra Modi's time to reciprocate. The *leap of faith* that Sheikh Hasina took in 2010 without getting much in return should now be returned many times over in another "leap of faith" by her Indian counterpart.<sup>9</sup>

India and Bangladesh are still caught up in the warp of trade-offs. The counting game continues. Their journey since 2010 has been an endeavour of economic complementarities and mutual development through friendly ties. However, the question of reciprocity continues to plague the bilateral relations. India has had similar issues in the past too; but Bangladesh continues to question India's intention to deliver. While the political leadership and elites on both sides seemed convinced that the two countries are on a journey of mutual prosperity, the ground support for this belief seems limited. It is not really clear what Bangladeshis mean by reciprocity in the context of such stupendous progress between the two governments. The lack of agreement on River Teesta may be partially instrumental in fuelling such perceptions.

Water sharing continues to be the most emotive issue for Bangladesh *vis à vis* India. Any other achievement and progress notwithstanding, India's inability to address this issue is often perceived as its failure to deliver. While India has given assurances that this issue will also be resolved soon, nothing short of actual resolution will satisfy Bangladesh. Here one must point out that despite the lack of any agreement, the flow of Teesta water has not been restricted. The question of lean season flows - which continues to be the main issue of concern for a lower riparian country - can only be determined through comprehensive data about the quantum flow. For the common Bangladeshi, the equitable solution to water sharing is the key to any successful bilateral initiative with India. If this is not forthcoming, for all the progress that may occur on different fronts, Bangladeshis will continue to ask what

India has delivered to them.

Apart from the issue of water sharing, the actual resolution regarding the exchange of enclaves needs a cautious approach. Given the high tempers that often run on both sides - and a recent nasty episode outside the cricket stadium in Dhaka post a One Day International cricket between the neighbours - any minor operational flap on the exchange of enclaves is bound to escalate into a major situation. The issues on the ground are often ignored when states resolve a tricky problem. In reality, the problem of 'land grabbing by powerful stake holders in the enclaves' has remained unchallenged for years. Moreover, many of the stakeholders have remained outside the interest and control of the states. In Banshpacha in Lalmonirhat, the residents claim that 160 out of the total 217 acres of land in the former enclave was under the illegal possession of 15 identified land grabbers.<sup>10</sup> Similar stories are replicated elsewhere in several of the enclaves. Expeditious management of the actual transfers is the need of the hour to avoid the beginning of another round of blame game between the two neighbours.

To sum up, India and Bangladesh have made significant progress on several matters, all of which certainly merit applause. However, more interesting is the progress made on sub-regional cooperation in the region. The bilateral connectivity will, no doubt, expand in the region, with other states like Nepal and Bhutan benefitting from the access to two Bangladeshi ports as well as trade through the Indian corridor. Matters of water sharing, trade and commerce, including energy, will soon go much beyond the bilateral prism. The recent motor vehicle agreement signed between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal is just a first but critical step towards a sub regional initiative that has gathered momentum amongst the South Asian neighbours. Certainly bilateral matters will continue to dominate and be seen as more critical between any two neighbours. The sub-regional cooperation process will ensure that incentives to find resolutions to certain outstanding bilateral matters will assume greater salience.

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<sup>1</sup> Mashihur Rahman, 'Agreement with India: Context and Consideration,' *Financial Express*, 26 February, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The majority of the deals were signed in the past five years. 18 were signed in 2015, two in 2014, seven in 2013, 10 in 2011, and 10 in 2010.

<sup>3</sup> This was the largest arms haul in Bangladesh (10 truckloads of weapons and ammunition, enough to arm an entire brigade), which had taken place on 1 April 2004 in the Chittagong area. Subsequent investigation revealed that the arms were to be supplied to insurgent groups

– ULFA and even NSCN-IM – operating in north eastern India. The BNP government had underplayed the issue because some of the top BNP leaders were involved in this case.

<sup>4</sup> Sreeradha Datta, ‘Complicity of state actors’, *IDSA Strategic Comments*, 9 March 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Sabir Mustafa, ‘Bangladesh Bloggers: Clear Pattern to the Killings’, BBC Asia, 12 May 2015, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32708975>.

<sup>6</sup> Iftekharul Bashar, ‘Islamist Militancy on the Rise in Bangladesh’, East Asia Forum, 8 August 2015, at <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/08/08/islamist-militancy-on-the-rise-in-bangladesh>.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Police ask Bangla Bloggers not to Cross Limits’, *The Telegraph*, 11 August 2014, at [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150811/jsp/foreign/story\\_36560.jsp#.Vcm79nGqqko](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150811/jsp/foreign/story_36560.jsp#.Vcm79nGqqko).

<sup>8</sup> Mahfuz Anam, ‘Modi, hopefully, is no Manmohan: Time for India to reciprocate the ‘leap of faith’ that Bangladesh took in 2010,’ *Daily Star*, 8 June 2015, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/modi-hopefully-no-manmohan-93751>.

<sup>9</sup> Mahfuz Anam, ‘Modi, hopefully, is no Manmohan: Time for India to reciprocate the ‘leap of faith’ that Bangladesh took in 2010,’ *Daily Star*, 8 June 2015, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/modi-hopefully-no-manmohan-93751>.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Land grabbing in former enclave: Government must tackle with a strong hand’, Editorial, *Daily Star*, 4 August 2015, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/editorial/land-grabbing-former-enclave-121189>.



## *India–Bangladesh Relations: A Dramatic Turnaround*

Tariq A. Karim\*

### **The Context**

When I took up my assignment as the Bangladesh High Commissioner to India in mid–2009, I had set for myself the ultimate goal: to somehow kick–start cooperation in the SAARC sub–region, defined as the South Asian Growth Quadrangle in 1997, which had since become moribund.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, it was painfully clear to me that before reaching that distant mountain – or even commencing its ascent – one would first have to overcome and, if possible, dramatically change the deeply entrenched mindset that was holding the relations between the two nations in this sub–region hostage. The relations between Bangladesh and India were quite protean since 1975 (the reasons for this can be debated elsewhere), and were, perhaps, at their lowest ebb ever in 2008.

Thus, I found on my arrival in New Delhi in 2009, that re–configuring the India–Bangladesh relationship was going to be of critical importance. By virtue of its large population that gave it gravitas in the regional context, Bangladesh perhaps held the key to redefining any form of regional cooperation and economic integration so desperately needed to lift the teeming millions of this strife–ridden region out of abject poverty. Thus, getting Bangladesh–India relations right was of seminal importance, and the place to start for me. Today, six years later, the two countries have come to the place described in the concept note for this debate.

Even as I put the finishing touches to the draft of this paper, a historic event is taking place: the exchange of enclaves as envisaged in the Bangladesh–India Land Boundary Agreement, and its Protocol is also being implemented. Undoubtedly this marks the closure of the first ever post–colonial land boundary disputes that has bedevilled relations in the post–partitioned Indian

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*In this article, the author traces developments in the past few years leading to the ‘dramatic turnaround’. He also discusses sub–regional governance structures to manage water resources.*

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subcontinent. The land boundary between India and Bangladesh is the largest that India has with any of its sovereign neighbours in the post-colonial era. It is also the fifth largest land boundary in the world. The decades old India-Bangladesh boundary dispute has been resolved amicably through bilateral negotiations between the actors involved and, without any external arbitration/mediation. This is the most remarkable indicator of the dramatic re-configuration of India-Bangladesh relations in the last six years: the barely concealed hostility and constantly underlying suspicion between the two countries has become a relationship marked by mutual trust and collaborative partnership in the interests of mutual and regional prosperity.

This turn-around is nothing short of miraculous, and enables me to hope that if it can be sustained and further built upon, my vision for the future will also come into the realm of the achievable. In short, cooperative bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh hold the key not only to making sub-regional cooperation feasible, but also to helping India meaningfully operationalise its “Act East” initiative. Both these goals are two sides of the same coin. Ultimately, one has the audacity to hope! The template of this new bilateral relationship may even serve as a model for the other SAARC countries that continue to be prisoners of the traumatic Partition of 1947. In my vision of the future, India and Bangladesh working closely together will be the key to a meaningful transformation of the larger regional relationships for the better.

### **The Dramatic Turnaround**

During the last six years, India and Bangladesh have surged ahead steadily in multiple sectors. Security cooperation between the two has never been better; indeed it is exemplary. Both have amicably resolved disputes, and completed the boundary demarcation on the land, in rivers, and in the Bay of Bengal. India has unilaterally extended duty free and quota free access to virtually all but 26 Bangladeshi products in the Indian market, resulting in a substantial increase in the volumes of bilateral trade. Eight border haats (markets) have been set up, to date, along Bangladesh’s borders with Meghalaya and Tripura, thus reconnecting and reviving historic economic connections that had existed between peoples and communities on both sides before they were disrupted. Many more are under active consideration. Indian investments in Bangladesh have surged dramatically – initially in the garments and textiles as well as telecom sectors, and now expanding steadily into the power and infrastructure sectors also.

Bangladesh has offered India an EPZ solely for setting up of Indian industries. To enable, augment and exponentially increase people-to-people connectivity, bus services between Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala, and between Dhaka-Sylhet-Shillong-Guwahati, as well as rail services between Dhaka-Kolkata have been effectively operationalised. The Motor Vehicles Agreement has also been signed very recently, which will augment this dramatically. Several ports of call have been added on both sides in the Inland Waters Transport and Trade Agreement that has been in vogue since 1972. A number of existing land ports and ICPs have been upgraded, and a few new ones that have been identified are in the process of upgradation, thus increasing the number of routes that will enhance land connectivity for trade as also people-to-people connectivity. When they are all fully made operational, the movement of goods and people will no longer remain hostage to the principal entry-exit points at Benapole-Petrapole and Akhaura-Agartala only in the east and west. North-south connectivity corridors will also be more effectively available, thus enabling land-locked Bhutan and Nepal to use Bangladeshi routes and ports more efficiently. Coastal and maritime shipping agreements that were signed very recently have also dramatically augmented the other existing connectivity points and modes.

### **Energy and Water Security: Gateways to the Future**

If the invention of the steam engine has symbolized the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain, and the setting up of the European Coal and Steel Community and EURATOM by six countries of Europe after World War II (of whom Germany and France had been mortal combatants in the two World Wars) has signified the new industrial and development revolution in post war Europe that inexorably led to the formation of the European Union, then it is self-evident that cooperation in the energy sector and ensuring energy security are the keys to economic growth, development, and societal upliftment in South Asia. In this context, most significantly, Bangladesh and India have embarked on energy cooperation that has long-term ramifications for development and sub-regional economic integration. Power-deficit Bangladesh is now importing 500 MW of power (it started with a modest goal of 250 MW that subsequently whetted the appetite for more) after linking up its western grid at Bheramara with India's national grid at Berhampur in West Bengal. Negotiations are actively underway to double this to 1000 MW in the foreseeable future. Bangladesh will import another 100 MW, to begin with from the Palatana Power Project in Tripura (that was enabled

with Bangladesh's assistance) by linking Bangladesh's grid at its eastern border in Comilla and Indian grid in Tripura.

Work on the Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company, a joint venture thermal power plant that will generate 1320 MW of electricity, is the largest such bilateral joint venture to date, and will become fully operational within the next couple of years. The most exciting prospect lies ahead: when the two countries link up their respective north-eastern grids, that could transform into becoming a gateway for India to finally invest in harvesting hydropower up to 60,000–80,000 MW (Bangladesh has expressed desire to obtain 20,000 MW from it) and evacuate the same to India's mainframe national grid via Bangladeshi enablement.

The remarkable Framework Agreement signed by the heads of government of the two countries in September 2011 also enabled the two to initiate discussions with Bhutan and Nepal, and set the stage for sub-regional cooperation in multiple sectors – most importantly in river basin managements and energy cooperation. The recent visit by the Indian Prime Minister to Bangladesh has set out the road map which, if followed diligently, could witness the connection between the power grids of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN)<sup>2</sup> in the foreseeable future. I envision the ultimate linking of all these presently separate bilateral power grid linkages as the harbinger of a sub-regional grid that, by creating a web of interlinking grids of symbiotic interdependence in the energy sector, will put in place the architecture of long-term energy security in this sub-region which no future political dispensation would wish to roll back or demolish. The recent apparent mellowing of the hitherto implacably hard-line, anti-India stance and rhetoric by Bangladesh's main opposition party may be viewed as the first indicator of such a future possibility.

Thus, sound bases for sub-regional cooperation and development are now firmly in place. India and Bangladesh can begin working together on the larger and more far-reaching agendas needed desperately to address economic development and the upliftment of their people. Today, security is no longer a single dimensional phenomenon, limited to the conventional security of the state and its citizens. Now, non-traditional security issues – like water security, energy security, and ecological and environmental security – have become far more consequentially important and all-encompassing, and subsume traditional security concerns. All these issues are, in a sense, holistically inter-related, and feed into each other. Addressing these will directly translate into enabling the respective governments to address food and employment security for their citizens. Conversely, not addressing these meaningfully will, in all

likelihood, have a deleterious multiplier effect of aggravating existing conventional security threats.

The starting point for attaining all this eventually lies in countries of the region embarking upon sub-regional cooperation on river basin managements. Adopting a cooperative approach on a regional/sub-regional basis in BBIN (which could also draw in China at a later, more appropriate time) would include the joint management of shared commons – such as, waters resources, forestry, from the region of the headwaters to the mouth – and would involve the massive employment of human capital along the entire passage of the river in a concerted collaborative effort. This massive employment-generation would have a multiplier effect on the socio-economic matrix, enhancing the security and stability of the peoples of the sub-region. The training of these rivers would also enable the expansion of existing irrigation channels (that would also serve as overflow drainage channels during high season floods), help in dredging for the restoration and sustainable navigability of the rivers, and create water conservation reservoirs/pondages for the generation of hydro-electricity. Opening up the rivers to better and more optimized use of river transportation will open up new service sectors and industries. Dying rivers would be revived, and the ecology resuscitated. The generation of hydro-electricity would also serve the purpose of rendering surplus hydrocarbon resources for intra-regional use, or export abroad.

They would also dramatically reduce the current rate of deforestation (for fuel as well as for illegal logging). The regeneration of forestry and increasing forest coverage would create new carbon-sequestration zones, and enhance existing ones. All these measures could be used as trade-offs in the negotiations on climate change dialogues, in terms of the existing provisions of the Kyoto Protocol. Additional important spin-offs from these exercises would be a sharp cutting down or elimination of soil erosion which generates new poverty – for instance the annual devastating floods devour thousands of acres of land and leave people homeless and cashless. Moreover, this would also reduce the progressive siltation of river-beds.

### **Better Management of Renewable Resources**

Such collaborative management of shared commons (waters resources, forestry) will also open up opportunities for multiple synergies in many other areas. These would include: dredging, reclaiming land lost earlier from erosion, refilling lost spaces, building secondary roads for embankment maintenance (resulting also in villages and communities reconnecting), reforestation, and

maintaining the integrity of reclaimed rivers. Governments could derive additional benefits by synergizing existing rural employment schemes with such sub-regional collaboration for development. Embarking on such multiple activities that merge into a holistic basin management regime will require vast numbers of people along both banks of the entire waterways. Being in a collaborative partnership will contribute immeasurably to inculcating among these peoples a sense of personal ownership of the river in whose reclamation and resuscitation they would be integrally involved.

However, with fresh waters being a progressively diminishing resource, ultimately a new governance structure would also be required to govern all these activities. Moreover, most of the rivers are trans-boundary ones (both in the domestic and international context). The management and governance of river basins and water resources in many other parts of the world, notably in Europe, USA and Australia are relegated to bodies with a quasi-judicial authority which determines and enforces rules and regulations for the optimal use of water bodies for the greater good of all.

### **Ensuring Water Security: Towards a Regional Governance Structure**

In a workshop held by Seattle-based think tank, National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), in RCSS, Colombo, I advocated the establishment of a new supra-national institution, the South Asian Water Security Authority (SAWSA) by South Asian countries by 2025.<sup>3</sup> This body would administer all issues relating to better, more efficient and more optimal management of all types of water bodies – ground water, surface water, and rainwater – in a holistic manner which would regulate the conservation and use of these resources as well as prevent abuse and wastage. Such an Authority would no doubt necessitate a *pooling* of sovereignty rather than a *ceding* sovereignty (an anathema in the nationalist paradigm). The formation of separate semi-autonomous Eastern Himalayan River Basins Management Body, a Western Himalayan River Basins Management Body, and a Central-Southern River Basins Management Body was already recommended in the 2010 Colombo workshop. Perhaps this idea is still too insurgent and early for many people or governments to stomach. However, the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) sub-regional cooperative framework, considered impossible a quarter century ago, is a growing reality today, and could only have been enabled by the establishment of cooperative bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh, India and Bhutan, and Bangladesh and Bhutan, and the subsequent triangulating of these three into one web.

Talks have now been officially initiated on cooperation along the Brahmaputra River Basin. The time has come for the three countries involved for setting up a Lower Brahmaputra Commission for the optimal management of this mighty river basin that nourishes such a vast swathe of land, and sustains such a large segment of the sub-continent's huge (and still growing) population. As and when China deems it in its own interest to join in this collaboration, the body so formed would graduate into the Brahmaputra River Commission, with benefits for everyone. The primary role of this Commission would be to rise above narrower national considerations while surveying the larger geo-morphological configuration, and adopt holistic measures that would preserve the life, resources and the ecology of the river in ways that would be beneficial to all peoples who inhabit the lands across which the river flows. The model for such cooperation could extend, logically, to the formation of a similar Ganges Commission and an Irrawaddy Commission embracing the Eastern Himalayan Rivers – and, who knows, perhaps in time also a Commission for the Western Himalayan Rivers that would draw in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia.

These waters sustain us and give us life; let us transform them from being waters of conflict to becoming instead waters of collaboration. If India and Bangladesh, working together during the last few years, could resuscitate sub-regional cooperation, can they not work together to expand this web of cooperation further eastwards, and eventually (and hopefully) westwards as well?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In 1995, as Bangladesh's Additional Foreign Secretary for South Asia and SAARC, the author had pointed out that, given the mutual suspicions, and even hostility, in the relations between South Asian countries (less among some, more among others), it was unlikely that SAARC would be able to move forward meaningfully as a body of the whole. Instead, sub-regional cooperation within the SAARC framework as an alternative strategy for regional cooperation was advocated. In 1997, the SAARC Heads of State and Government finally accepted Bangladesh's proposal, and the SAGQ – comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal – was established. However, soon after being set up, with a Council of Foreign Ministers to explore cooperation in four core areas, it went into a state of hibernation.

<sup>2</sup> Please see Tariq Karim's 'Rethinking regional cooperation in South Asia: Changing the paradigm from the regional framework to integrated sub-regional development', in *South and Central Asia, Issues of Peace and Development*, Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, Chandigarh, November 2009 (ISBN: 81-85835-57-8).

<sup>3</sup> This was part of a more comprehensive proposal for the establishment of a South Asian Regional Ecological and Environmental Security Authority (SAREESA). Please see, NBR Project Report 2013: 'The Future of South Asian Security: Prospects for a Non-traditional Regional Security Architecture' ([http://www.nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/PSA/NTS\\_projectreport\\_April2013.pdf](http://www.nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/PSA/NTS_projectreport_April2013.pdf)).



## ***Joint Declaration between Bangladesh and India<sup>1</sup>***

during Visit of Prime Minister of India to Bangladesh

### ***“Notun Projonmo – Nayi Disha”***

June 07, 2015

1. At the invitation of the Prime Minister of the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of India, Mr. Narendra Modi, paid a State visit to Bangladesh from 6-7 June 2015.
2. During the visit, Prime Minister of India called on H.E. Mr. Md. Abdul Hamid, Hon’ble President of Bangladesh.
3. Prime Minister Modi laid a wreath at the National Martyrs’ Memorial at Savar as a mark of respect to the memory and contribution of the great freedom fighters of Bangladesh. He paid rich tribute and respect to the memory of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhaka.
4. Sushri Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal, also joined Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka on June 6, 2015 for the historic ceremony wherein they witnessed the exchange of instruments of ratification of the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement, 1974 and its 2011 Protocol. The three leaders jointly flagged off the 2 bus services connecting Bangladeshi and Indian cities.
5. Prime Minister Modi received, on behalf of the former Prime Minister of India Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the ‘Bangladesh Liberation War Honour’ from President Mr. Md. Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.
6. Prime Minister Modi visited the Dhakeswari Temple and the Ramakrishna Mission on 7 June 2015, and spoke at a public event at the Bangabandhu International Convention Centre (BICC) in Dhaka on 7 June 2015.
7. Prime Minister Modi had a meeting with Prime Minister Hasina on 6 June 2015 which was followed by the delegation level talks. Both the meeting and the talks were marked by great warmth and cordiality reflecting the excellent bilateral relations and friendship that exist between the two countries. The two Prime Ministers led their respective sides in the talks. Prime Minister Hasina hosted a banquet preceded by a cultural programme in honour of Prime Minister Modi and his delegation.

8. During the talks, the two Prime Ministers recalled the shared bonds of history, tradition, aspirations and multitude of other commonalities between the two countries and reiterated their firm conviction to further strengthen the bilateral relations. They recognized that the destinies of the peoples of the two countries were interlinked in their quest for peace, development and stability. The two Prime Ministers also noted that India and Bangladesh have entered a new phase in bilateral relations with a pragmatic, mature and practical approach based on sovereignty, equality, friendship, trust and understanding for the mutual benefit of their peoples and collective prosperity of the region.
9. Prime Minister Modi recalled with deep respect the visionary leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He appreciated the impressive socio-economic development in Bangladesh especially in the areas of economic growth, poverty eradication, women's empowerment and education, under the leadership of Prime Minister Hasina. He also appreciated the steps taken by her towards strengthening democracy and promoting peace, security and stability in the region and beyond. He complimented Prime Minister Hasina for her support to innovative ideas for enhancing sub-regional cooperation and connectivity. He also appreciated her commitment to the betterment of bilateral ties with India and the many path breaking initiatives taken by her to provide greater depth and substance to the relationship.
10. Prime Minister Hasina appreciated Prime Minister Modi for his dynamic and pragmatic approach in leading the largest democracy and one of the largest and fastest growing economies in the world. She expressed her firm belief that Prime Minister Modi's leadership would bring in fresh impetus to the excellent bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India.
11. Both the Prime Ministers underscored the need to preserve the memory and legacy of the Great Liberation War and the freedom fighters. Prime Minister Hasina sought assistance from India in bringing back the mortal remains of valiant freedom fighters of Bangladesh who had been buried in Indian soil during 1971 War of Liberation. Prime Minister Modi agreed to extend necessary cooperation in this regard. Prime Minister Hasina recalled with gratitude India's enormous contribution to the glorious Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. Prime Minister Modi conveyed appreciation to the Government of Bangladesh for conferring the 'Bangladesh Liberation War Honour' on former Prime Minister of India, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, for his outstanding contribution to the Liberation War of Bangladesh. He also appreciated Bangladesh's initiative to honour

the memory of Indian soldiers who had laid down their lives in Bangladesh's Liberation War. Prime Minister Modi conveyed that these gestures of Bangladesh will always be remembered and cherished by the people of India and that these are testimony to the close ties between the two peoples. The two Prime Ministers noted with satisfaction the ongoing practice of joint celebration of Victory Day at Kolkata and Dhaka and also implementation of Mukti joddha scholarship scheme for heirs of the Mukti joddhas. Prime Minister Modi handed over to Prime Minister Hasina memento of INS Vikrant, which played an important role in the Liberation War. Prime Minister Modi also handed over to Prime Minister Hasina the audio recording of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic speech on 06 February 1972 at a mammoth rally at Brigade Maidan, Kolkata during his first State visit to India after the independence of Bangladesh. Prime Minister Hasina thanked Prime Minister Modi for this special gesture.

12. Both Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction over the historic passage of the 100<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha of the Indian Parliament to give effect to the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and its 2011 Protocol. They recognized that this was a milestone in Bangladesh-India relations. Prime Minister Modi handed over to Prime Minister Hasina the video recording of the debate on this Bill in the Indian Parliament. They recalled with gratitude the role played by the then Prime Minister of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the then Prime Minister of India Smt. Indira Gandhi in this regard. Prime Minister Hasina appreciated the political parties and political leaders in India for the great demonstration of camaraderie in the unanimous adoption of the bill. The two Prime Ministers gave directives to the concerned officials on both sides for expeditious implementation of the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and its 2011 Protocol on the ground. The two Prime Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to extend all facilities to the residents of the enclaves and ensure that the rights of all citizens are protected. The historic instruments of ratification of the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and its 2011 Protocol were exchanged and modalities for ensuring smooth implementation of the said Agreement and Protocol were worked out under an exchange of letters.
13. The two Prime Ministers recalled the "Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development" of 2011 that outlines the shared vision for an enduring and long-term cooperation and commits to achieve closer ties through economic integration and better connectivity. They stressed on taking stock of the achievements and charting ways for future cooperation.

14. The two Prime Ministers noted with satisfaction the continued exchange of high level visits which helped achieve a better understanding on many of the issues under discussion. They agreed to encourage more such high level interaction between the two sides. They also appreciated the regular holding of meetings of sectoral institutional mechanisms for continually promoting bilateral relations.
15. Both the Prime Ministers appreciated the progress made in the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) held in New Delhi on 20 September 2014 led by the two Ministers of Foreign/External Affairs and directed them to coordinate, oversee and follow up implementation of initiatives as well as explore newer avenues for cooperation. It was agreed that the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the JCC would be held in 2015 in Dhaka.
16. The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at the unparalleled level of cooperation between the two countries on security related issues and reaffirmed their unequivocal and uncompromising position against extremism and terrorism in all forms and manifestations, as well as their commitment to cooperate with each other by sharing information about groups and persons indulging in terrorism. They reiterated their commitment that their respective territories would not be allowed to be used for any activity inimical to the other. Prime Minister Modi expressed India's appreciation for the cooperation extended by Bangladesh in security related matters. The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at the conclusion of the MOUs on Prevention of Smuggling of Fake Currency Notes, Cooperation between Coast Guards and Prevention of Human Trafficking, all of which will augment security cooperation.
17. The two Prime Ministers stressed the need for effective implementation of the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) for better border management so as to prevent cross border criminal activities, irregular movement, incidents of violence and tragic loss of lives. They expressed confidence that it would enhance cooperation between the border guarding forces of the two countries, and enable them to manage the identified vulnerable areas with a view to preventing criminal activities, irregular movement, acts of violence and loss of lives along the border areas. They agreed on the need to free the borders from criminal activities. Both Prime Ministers also welcomed the finalisation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for allowing usage of Indian border roads for construction and maintenance of Border Out Posts (BOPs) of Border Guards Bangladesh as well as use of Indian medical facilities in difficult areas in the border area by Bangladeshi personnel, who are deployed in

vicinity. Both Prime Ministers reiterated that the number of deaths at the border must be brought down to zero and directed the concerned authorities and border guarding forces to work to that effect. The two Prime Ministers welcomed the holding of 1<sup>st</sup> round of meetings of DCs/DMs of clusters of bordering districts and put emphasis on regular holding of meetings.

18. Prime Minister Hasina invited India's cooperation in jointly developing the Ganges Barrage on the river Padma in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Modi conveyed that he would have the matter examined by the concerned agencies in India.
19. Prime Minister Hasina requested Prime Minister Modi for immediate conclusion of the Interim Agreement on Sharing of the Water of Teesta as agreed upon by both the governments in January 2011. Prime Minister Modi conveyed that deliberations are underway involving all stakeholders with regard to conclusion of the Interim Agreements on sharing of waters of Teesta and Feni as soon as possible. The two Prime Ministers noted that discussions on various aspects relating to sharing of waters of the Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar rivers were taking place at technical levels under JRC and asked the concerned officials for taking expeditious action to conclude the sharing arrangements at the earliest.
20. The two Prime Ministers recalled Article-2 of the Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development of 2011 and reiterated their commitment to address the issue of water resources management of common rivers including water sharing, in a holistic manner through common basin management.
21. Prime Minister Modi reiterated the earlier commitment that India would not take any unilateral decision on the Himalayan component of their River Interlinking Project which may affect Bangladesh. Prime Minister Modi also conveyed that the Tipaimukh Hydro-Electric Power Project is not likely to be taken forward in its present form due to statutory requirements on the Indian side and that India would not take any unilateral decision on this matter that may adversely impact Bangladesh.
22. The two Prime Ministers stressed the need for holding the 38<sup>th</sup> Ministerial meeting of the JRC at an early date to discuss all issues pertinent to water resources for mutual benefit.
23. Both the Prime Ministers expressed deep satisfaction at the level of cooperation and achievements in the power sector between the two

countries and agreed to widen the cooperation further. Prime Minister Modi expressed his appreciation for Prime Minister Hasina's untiring efforts in improving the power situation in Bangladesh and her Government's consistent efforts in implementing the 2021 Goal i.e. to achieve installed capacity of 24,000 MW power by the year 2021. He also conveyed that India can be a major partner in achieving this goal and many Indian corporates have the capacity to cooperate with Bangladesh in this endeavour. He requested Prime Minister Hasina for facilitating the entry of Indian companies in the power generation, transmission and distribution sector of Bangladesh. The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at the steps being taken to quickly enhance the supply by 30–50 MW over the existing transmission line so that the net power supply to Bangladesh increases to 500 MW. Both sides further welcomed the steps being taken to augment supply of power through the Bheramara-Baharampur grid inter-connection from 500 MW to 1,000 MW and to operationalise the supply of 100 MW of power from India including from Palatana Power Plant to eastern side of Bangladesh and directed the concerned officials to complete the work in a time-bound manner. To enhance power grid connectivity as envisaged in the Framework Agreement, Prime Minister Modi agreed in principle to consider Bangladesh's proposal to allow import from India to Bangladesh additional power in phased manner through construction of an additional grid interconnection on western side of Bangladesh.

24. Both sides welcomed the consensus between Bangladesh and India to evacuate power from the North-eastern region of India (Rangia/Rowta) to Muzaffarnagar of India through Bangladesh constructing a  $\pm 800$  KV, 7000 MW HVDC multi-terminal bi-pole DC grid line with suitable power tapping points at Barapukuria in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Modi agreed in principle to consider Bangladesh's request for providing adequate power from this line for Bangladesh keeping in view the grid security of both countries. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the pace of work of the Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company's 1320 MW coal-fired power plant at Rampal, Bagerhat, Bangladesh, and were optimistic that the plant will be operational by the target date and meet the exacting environmental and energy efficiency standards to become a fine example of Bangladesh-India cooperation.
25. Noting Bangladesh's interest in importing power in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) framework, India agreed to favourably consider such import subject to grid security, transmission, interconnection and

- applicable laws, rules and regulations of the respective countries.
26. The two Prime Ministers agreed to further enhance cooperation in energy sector particularly in renewable energy and nuclear energy. Both Prime Ministers agreed to cooperate in the field of civil nuclear energy, especially training for technical personnel.
  27. Keeping in view the growing cooperation between the two countries in the energy sector, the two Prime Ministers decided to initiate an annual India-Bangladesh Energy Dialogue to be led jointly by Secretary (Petroleum) of India and Secretary, Power Division of Bangladesh to undertake comprehensive energy sector cooperation including areas of coal, natural gas, LNG, supply of petroleum products in the sub-region, renewable energy, oil and gas pipelines etc.
  28. The two Prime Ministers welcomed the MOU and the Sale–Purchase Agreement signed between Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) for construction of a pipeline from Siliguri to Parbatipur for supply of High Speed Diesel to Bangladesh. They directed the officials to quickly finalize the terms for establishment of the Joint Venture Company which will construct and operate the pipeline.
  29. The two Prime Ministers welcomed the renewal of the bilateral Trade Agreement with the new trade facilitation provisions which would not only further widen bilateral trade, investment and economic cooperation in a balanced and sustainable manner to mutual benefit but also open up opportunities for regional trade. Recalling Article 1 of the Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development, the two Prime Ministers directed concerned officials to remove all barriers to ensure unfettered bilateral trade. Both sides underscored the need to narrow the trade imbalance.
  30. The two Prime Ministers underscored the importance of harmonization of standards and mutual recognition of agreements and certificates for enhancing bilateral trade. They welcomed the conclusion of the Bilateral Cooperation Agreement between the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). They also agreed to keep each other informed of new legislation, rules and regulations in safety and testing to facilitate easy compliance and upgradation of facilities.
  31. Both the Prime Ministers stressed the urgent need for up-gradation of infrastructure of the Land Customs Stations (LCSs)/Land Ports/Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) in a coordinated manner. They noted with satisfaction

that the work of opening immigration facilities at Phulbari (opposite Banglabandha) has been completed and that the immigration post would be operationalised soon.

32. The two Prime Ministers noted with appreciation the positive experience gained from the functioning of the Border Haats and stressed the need to open more border haats at mutually agreed locations.
33. Prime Minister Modi emphasized the importance and need to increase Indian investment in Bangladesh and underscored the role of the private sector in this regard. He welcomed the decision of Bangladesh to allocate land for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for India. The two Prime Ministers welcomed the conclusion of MoU for Establishment of Indian SEZs in Bangladesh and directed the concerned officials to work to realize this goal at the earliest. Mongla and Bheramara were identified as possible locations.
34. The two Prime Ministers welcomed the signing of the Coastal Shipping Agreement which would open up newer avenues of cooperation in the areas of bilateral & regional trade and connectivity. They also noted with satisfaction the renewal of the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) with new trade facilitation measures. Both the Prime Ministers agreed on the need for dredging of the Bangladesh–India inland water protocol routes to utilize their full potential. Both the Prime Ministers directed the officials to explore the possibilities of development of entire protocol route with assured Least Available Depth (LAD) with international funding. Prime Minister Modi agreed to provide necessary assistance for enhancing navigability of the routes as envisaged in the Framework Agreement.
35. The two Prime Ministers agreed to expedite collaborative efforts towards developing a successor organization of the erstwhile International Jute Study Group. Bangladesh appreciated India's assurance of unhindered sourcing of cotton from India for Bangladesh.
36. Both Prime Ministers emphasized the importance of seamless, multi-modal connectivity to ensure regional economic development and people-to-people contact. They noted that roadways, railways and waterways were the building blocks to an inter-dependent and mutually beneficial relationship among the countries of the region. Prime Minister Modi appreciated the various initiatives taken by the Government of Bangladesh in this regard. Both Prime Ministers also agreed to commence negotiations on a Multi Modal Transport Agreement between the two countries and to

constitute a Joint Task Force for this purpose.

37. The two Prime Ministers welcomed the commencement of Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati and Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala Bus services. The Indian Prime Minister also conveyed that the new bus services on Khulna-Kolkata and Jessore-Kolkata as proposed by Bangladesh, may be operationalised after completion of consultations by both sides. Reviewing developments regarding proposal for construction of a bridge over the river Feni at Ramgarh-Subroom, the two Prime Ministers directed for its expeditious construction.
38. Prime Minister Modi agreed to consider Bangladesh's proposal to introduce the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maitree Express between Khulna and Kolkata. The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction about the ongoing cooperation in the railways sector including the Akhaura-Agartala railway link and revival of the old railway links. They directed the concerned officials of both sides to take measures for ensuring more passenger-friendly customs and immigration facilities for the passengers of Maitree Express. Prime Minister Modi announced that India will construct a modern International Passenger Terminal (IPT) at a suitable location in India so as to facilitate customs and immigration requirements of passengers travelling on the Kolkata-Dhaka Maitri Express and other trains that are to connect India and Bangladesh.
39. Both the Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at the utilization of the first line of credit of US\$ 800 million, which was enhanced by an additional US\$62 million and US\$ 200 million grant extended by India to Bangladesh.
40. Prime Minister Modi announced a second Line of Credit worth US\$ 2 billion for Bangladesh for undertaking various development projects. The Line of Credit is to be utilized, inter alia, for developmental projects particularly in the area of public transport, roads, railways, inland waterways, ports, ICT, education, health etc.
41. Both Prime Ministers agreed that the advantages of sub-regional cooperation in power sector, water resources, trade, transit and connectivity should be harnessed to mutual benefit. In this context, both Prime Ministers noted with satisfaction the progress made by the Joint Working Groups on Sub-Regional Cooperation between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) on Water Resources Management and Power/Hydropower and on Connectivity and Transit. Following discussions at the two meetings of the Joint Working Groups held so far, the concerned authorities in the respective countries are working towards

identifying potential future power projects in the sub-region to be undertaken jointly involving at least three countries on equitable basis for joint development and financing. They are also exchanging ideas on potential cargo (roads and railways) and bus routes involving at least three countries. The relevant authorities in the four countries are also exploring the possibility of using multimodal transport to meet their commercial as well as tourist needs. They are also considering ways and means of improving trade facilitation at land border stations so as to enhance sub-regional connectivity and cooperation.

42. The two Prime Ministers recognized the need to exploit the synergies between the two countries for expanding the relationship to newer areas. They expressed satisfaction at bilateral cooperation in new areas including nuclear science and technology, space, health, jute and textiles, renewable energy, fisheries, meteorological, and other areas related to development. The two Prime Ministers especially applauded science and technology (S&T) cooperation that is being undertaken under the ambit of the India-Bangladesh Joint Science & Technology Committee, whose fourth meeting took place in New Delhi in December, 2014 coordinated by the Ministry of Science & Technology from Bangladesh side and Department of Science & Technology (DST) from Indian side. Both Prime Ministers appreciated the efforts for spearheading S&T cooperation in various areas. Both Prime Ministers noted with satisfaction launch of India Science Research Fellowship which enables scientists/researchers from Bangladesh to carry out research work at various Indian Institutes. Prime Minister Modi invited more researchers and scientists from Bangladesh to undergo training and exposure in various Indian scientific institutions, particularly in the areas of biotechnology and oceanography, which are identified as priority areas by Bangladesh.
43. Prime Minister Hasina informed that the 'Bangabandhu Satellite-I', the first Bangladesh satellite, is scheduled to be launched in 2017 which would take the country to the next level of scientific advancement. She appreciated the SAARC Satellite project being undertaken by India.
44. The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at the amicable settlement of the maritime boundary between the two countries. To harness the vast economic opportunities this has opened up, they agreed to work closely on the development of ocean-based Blue Economy and Maritime Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and chart out the ways for future cooperation.

45. Both Prime Ministers agreed that climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing mankind today and expressed their resolve for ambitious climate action in their countries in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development. They underscored the importance of working together and with other countries to conclude an ambitious, comprehensive, balanced and equitable climate agreement in Paris in 2015 that will also address the issue of genuine technology collaboration and financial support in meeting this common global challenge. They agreed to intensify bilateral cooperation in the areas of climate change and environment protection.
46. The two Prime Ministers also welcomed the signing of the MOU to implement the grant assistance of INR 5 crores from the India Endowment for Climate Change for installation of 70,000 improved cook stoves in Bangladesh.
47. As a technology demonstration pilot project, Prime Minister Modi announced provisioning and installation by India of solar power-based home systems including light bulbs, mobile charging facilities, fans and cook stoves to an off-grid village in Bangladesh.
48. Recognizing the ongoing cooperation between the two countries in the sector of education, the two Prime Minister reaffirmed their commitment to widen this cooperation for mutual benefit. In this connection, they appreciated the various collaborative arrangements between the universities and educational institutes of the two countries. The two Prime Ministers also welcomed the Bangladesh–India Education Initiative and expressed confidence that the framework provided by the Initiative will enable relationships to prosper between institutions of the two countries.
49. Prime Minister Hasina expressed appreciation for the assistance provided by India, under the bilateral MOU on Small Development Projects, for city improvement projects being undertaken in Rajshahi, Sylhet, Khulna & Narsingdi.
50. Prime Minister Hasina thanked India for the substantive strengthening of capacity building programme being undertaken for Bangladesh under the ITEC programme, especially the custom designed courses such as the mid-career training programme for Bangladesh civil servants. She sought continued support of India in training of Bangladesh officials. Prime Minister Modi reiterated India’s commitment to training and capacity building of Bangladesh officials and technical personnel.
51. Expressing happiness at the cultural exchanges between the two countries, the two Prime Ministers agreed to further enhance such exchanges. They

also noted with satisfaction the implementation of various projects by both the countries for this purpose.

52. Both Prime Ministers welcomed growing exchanges between the two peoples which is helping foster greater understanding and goodwill between the two countries. They agreed to further increase people-to-people contacts. In this context, it was agreed that Doordarshan and Bangladesh Television (BTV) will enter into an agreement to allow BTV to join Prasar Bharati's DTH platform.
53. Both Prime Ministers agreed that strengthening diplomatic and consular presence in each other's country will further boost people-to-people contacts. Prime Minister Hasina appreciated the concurrence of the Government of India to the opening of a Deputy High Commission of Bangladesh in Guwahati as well as upgradation of Bangladesh Visa Office in Agartala to an Assistant High Commission. Prime Minister Modi appreciated the concurrence of Government of Bangladesh for the opening of India's Assistant High Commissions in Khulna and Sylhet.
54. Prime Minister Modi deeply appreciated the Government of Bangladesh for allowing transshipment of 25,000 Metric Tonnes of food grains to Tripura across Bangladesh territory on humanitarian cause. Prime Minister Hasina deeply appreciated the cooperation extended by Government of India for facilitating movement of humanitarian assistance from Bangladesh for the victims of the recent earthquake in Nepal.
55. Prime Minister Hasina deeply appreciated India's assistance in bringing back Bangladesh nationals from Yemen.
56. Both Prime Ministers reaffirmed their shared commitment to deepen regional cooperation to maximize the mutuality of interests and to ensure equitable share of mutual benefits in all areas, including trade, transport and energy. They recognized the importance of various regional/sub-regional cooperative/collaborative initiatives to improve the lives and livelihoods of all the people across the two countries. Prime Minister Hasina thanked India for the 24 Automatic Weather Stations set up by India under the SAARC STORM programme built by Antrix Corporation of India for the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.
57. Pledging to work closely in furthering relevant regional/sub-regional cooperation processes including SAARC, BIMSTEC and BCIM-EC, the two Prime Ministers reviewed various steps taken in this regard. They welcomed the agreement on establishing of the BIMSTEC electricity grid and expressed the hope that the BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement will be

finalized soon. They also expressed confidence that the BCIM-EC Study Group reports would be finalized soon to allow decision making with regard to several projects envisaged under this framework, particularly the Kolkata-to-Kunming Highway Project.

58. The two Prime Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to work closely in the UN and other multi-lateral organizations including WTO. They underscored the importance of coordinating each other's position on the emerging global development architecture including Post-2015 Development Agenda, Migration and Development, and other multi-lateral issues of common interest. The two sides stressed the need for concluding the Doha Development Round under the WTO, in accordance with its development mandate and especially ensuring an early harvest of the development deliverables for LDCs. Both sides noted with satisfaction contributions of both countries to UN Peacekeeping Operations and agreed to work together to pursue the ongoing Peacekeeping reform process at the UN in the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year of its establishment. Both Prime Ministers reiterated the importance of an effective multilateral system, centred on a strong United Nations, as a key factor in tackling global challenges. They expressed concern at the slow pace of progress on the long standing subject of UN Security Council Reform and called for urgent outcomes to be achieved in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the United Nations. They reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) and called for results oriented outcome of the negotiations that brings about comprehensive reform of the Security Council including an expansion in both categories of membership. Prime Minister Hasina reiterated her country's support for India's candidature for permanent membership of an expanded and reformed UN Security Council.
59. Both Prime Ministers underscored the need for strengthening and reform of multilateral financial institutions and enhancing the voice and participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making. They welcomed the potential role the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank may play in responding to needs of the developing countries. In this connection, Prime Minister Modi took note of Bangladesh's request to become a member of the New Development Bank in due course.
60. The following bilateral documents were signed, exchanged, adopted and handed over during the visit:
  - i. Exchange of Instruments of Ratification of 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and its 2011 Protocol

- ii. Exchange of letters on Modalities for implementation of 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and its 2011 Protocol
- iii. Bilateral Trade Agreement (renewal)
- iv. Agreement on Coastal Shipping between Bangladesh and India
- v. Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (renewal)
- vi. Bilateral Cooperation Agreement between Bangladesh Standards & Testing Institution (BSTI) and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) on Cooperation in the field of Standardization.
- vii. Agreement on Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati Bus Service and its Protocol
- viii. Agreement on Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala Bus Service and its Protocol
- ix. Memorandum of Understanding between Coast Guards
- x. Memorandum of Understanding on Prevention of Human Trafficking
- xi. Memorandum of Understanding on Prevention of Smuggling and Circulation of Fake Currency Notes
- xii. Memorandum of Understanding between Bangladesh and India for Extending a New Line of Credit (LoC) of US\$ 2 billion by Government of India to Government of Bangladesh
- xiii. Memorandum of Understanding on Blue Economy and Maritime Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean
- xiv. Memorandum of Understanding on Use of Chittagong and Mongla Ports
- xv. Memorandum of Understanding for a Project under IECC (India Endowment for Climate Change) of SAARC
- xvi. Memorandum of Understanding on Indian Economic Zone
- xvii. Cultural Exchange Programme for the years 2015–17
- xviii. Statement of Intent on Bangladesh-India Education Cooperation (adoption)
- xix. Agreement between Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Limited (BSCCL) and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) for leasing of international bandwidth for internet at Akhaura
- xx. Memorandum of Understanding between University of Dhaka, Bangladesh and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, India for Joint Research on Oceanography of the Bay of Bengal

- xxi. Memorandum of Understanding between University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh and University of Jamia Milia Islamia, India
  - xxii. Handing over of Consent Letter by Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA), Bangladesh to Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), India to start operations in Bangladesh
61. In a ceremonial event at the Prime Minister's Office, the two Prime Ministers unveiled/inaugurated/flagged off the following:
- i. Flagging off Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati Bus Service
  - ii. Flagging off Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala Bus Service
  - iii. Unveiling of Foundation Stone for Construction of Khulna-Mongla Railway line
  - iv. Unveiling of Foundation Stone for Rehabilitation of Kalaura-Shahbajpur section of Bangladesh Railways.
  - v. Inauguration of Tarapur-Kamlasagar Border Haat
  - vi. Unveiling of Foundation Stone for Bangladesh - India Friendship Building at National Police Academy, Sardah
  - vii. Inauguration of Upgraded Laboratories at BSTI
  - viii. Unveiling of Foundation Stone of Rabindra Bhaban Kuthibari, Shilaidaha
  - ix. Unveiling of Foundation Stone for Construction of Bangladesh - India Friendship Bridge-1 over Feni River
62. Prime Minister Modi handed over the following to Prime Minister Hasina:
- i. Audio recording of Bangabandhu's Speech at Brigade Maidan, Kolkata (06 February 1972)
  - ii. DVD of Parliamentary Debate on Land Boundary Agreement
  - iii. Mementos of INS Vikrant
  - iv. Replica of a dredger supplied to Mongla Port
  - v. Photo and replica of one of the 24 Automatic Weather Stations installed in Bangladesh under the STORM programme
63. Prime Minister Hasina handed over the following to Prime Minister Modi:
- i. A photograph of the "Signing Instrument of Surrender 1971"
  - ii. A map indicating the location of SEZs for India
  - iii. A photograph of the model of the Maitree Super Thermal Power

Project (2x660 MW) at Rampal.

64. Prime Minister Modi thanked Prime Minister Hasina for the warmth and cordiality shown and gracious hospitality extended to him and members of his delegation during their stay in Bangladesh.
65. Prime Minister Modi extended an invitation to Prime Minister Hasina to pay a visit to India. The invitation was accepted and it was agreed that the visit would take place at a mutually convenient date.

**Dhaka**

**June 7, 2015**