

INDIA'S POLICY TOWARDS BANGLADESH DURING UPA GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

India and Bangladesh share proximity of culture, history, language and geography. India's relations with Bangladesh are multi-dimensional- ideological, political and also economic. An extreme sense of distrust, insecurity and perceived domination by India has shaped Bangladesh's foreign policy in recent years. In spite of this intimate relationship, ties between the two countries have remained problematic. Among the many challenges facing the relationship are river water sharing, trade and transit, illegal migration and border management. One recent source of tension has been violence on the border. Even though there have been attempts on both sides to bring peace and tranquility to the border, success has been elusive. In the social, cultural and economic fields the two countries tried to strengthen their bonds and concluded a number of agreements. Similarly in the field of science and technology the two countries agreed to cooperate. The two countries also amicably settled certain border issues. The last decade has seen a new development in India's foreign policy, The UPA government has sought to improve political relations and deepen economic partnership with Bangladesh. This paper examines the India's ties with Bangladesh, areas of cooperation and challenges during UPA government. This paper seeks to establish the challenged and opportunities for furtherance of India-Bangladesh ties, in light of recent development.

Keywords: *Brief History, India's Foreign Policy, Area of Cooperation and Challenges, Future Prospects.*

INTRODUCTION

India and Bangladesh, two sub-continental neighbours have always shared strong cultural, linguistic, social, economic and geographical ties. Common history, economic interactions and geostrategic interests make India and Bangladesh vital to each other. As one of the major immediate neighbours surrounding Bangladesh, India naturally occupies a pivotal position in its foreign policy. The geostrategic conditions, economic interactions, energy supplies, trade links, ethno-cultural proximity and historical linkages provide a plethora of opportunities for close cordial and cooperative relations between the two countries. India's contribution towards Bangladesh's war of liberation in 1971 was critical to the latter's emergence as an independent entity. However, events that followed the liberation of Bangladesh did not result in the continuance of cordial relations between these two countries as was expected. There are a few fundamental issues between India and Bangladesh such as land and maritime boundary demarcation, the sharing of water from 54 common rivers, informal trade, transnational crime and interference in internal affairs that have adversely affected their relationship. The last decade has seen a new development in India's foreign policy. The UPA government have sought to improve political relations and deepen economic partnership with Bangladesh. In the social, cultural and economic fields the two countries tried to strengthen their bonds and concluded a number of agreements. Similarly in the field of science and technology the two countries agreed to cooperate. The two countries also amicably settled certain border issues.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF PAST HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENTS INDIA AND THE EMERGENCE OF BANGLADESH

It was because of the timely, moral and material support of Government of India that Bangladesh emergence as sovereign country was possible on the map of the world. The liberation struggle had its roots in the past. The people of East Pakistan were discriminated in every sphere, i-e., political, cultural, economic and administration. Against the discriminatory policy of Pakistan Government, a movement was launched in East Pakistan for full autonomy after the Indo-Pak war of 1965. After the General Election in Pakistan in December 1970, a struggle for power started between the AL and the Pakistan's Peoples Party and also led to the liberation struggle in East Pakistan. To save their lives and self-respect people fled to India because they found it a safer place. The refugee problem posed a threat to Indian economy and social structure. India was very much concerned at the events in East Pakistan which is close to the Indian border. Mrs. Indira Gandhi immediately called a meeting of her cabinet

and also discussed with the opposition leaders in both the Houses of Parliament the grave situation prevailing in East Pakistan. A resolution moved by Mrs. Gandhi was passed by the Parliament, calling upon all the people and Governments of the world to take urgent and constructive steps to prevail upon the Pakistan Government to put an end immediately, to the systematic discrimination of people which amounts to genocide. It was a moral support which the people of Bangladesh got from India. In 1971, India supported a democratic resistance in East Pakistan against pogroms conducted by the Pakistan army and then invaded the territory reducing by half its principal adversary in South Asia.

INDO-BANGLADESH TREATY

After the withdrawn of Indian troops was completed, Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi landed at Dhaka Airport on 17 March 1972. At the Airport in brief speech in Bengali she emphasized that whatever help, India had given to Bangladesh was in pursuance of her own ideas and not for ulterior motives. India wanted Bangladesh to become strong and prosperous because it was India's own interest to have such a neighbour. To further strengthen the relations between the two countries and to give them some sort of permanent form, The Government of India and Bangladesh signed on the pattern of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation of 1971, 25 years Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and Peace on 19 March 1972.

BORDER AGREEMENT OF 1974

Both the countries signed a Border Agreement in May 1974 when Sheikh Mujib Rahman visited India and solved the problem of Dahagram, Berubari and Angarpota enclaves under the agreement while the Berubari union would remain in India. Bangladesh would retain the Dahagram and Angarpota enclaves. It was also agreed to define the border more accurately at certain points and to complete demarcation of the land boundaries between the two countries.

CO-OPERATION IN SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FIELDS

The interaction between India and Bangladesh in the social, cultural and economic areas was quite frequent in the Sheikh Mujib era, but later on the circumstances and some other factors created obstacles in the smooth running. Both the countries have signed a large number of agreements in these fields. To promote science and technology, both the countries cooperated with each other and signed a number of agreements during the Sheikh Mujib and in post Mujib era. India had played a memorable role in the construction of Bangladesh economy and social set up which were totally shattered during the liberation struggle. The economic relations should be further strengthened because India is the only country from where Bangladesh can import items of her choice more easily and comparatively at cheaper rates. It would also help in curbing the activities of smugglers and other group of people from both the countries who are otherwise involved in the illegal trade.

INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

India achieved independence on August 15, 1947 that immediately necessitated foreign policy making by this country. India becomes a member of international community comprising sovereign countries. India's independence initiated the process of decolonization and India decided to support all anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggles. Yet, India's foreign policy is largely based on her history and culture. Speaking in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Nehru had said in March 1950. "It should not be supposed that we are starting on a clean slate. It is a policy which flowed from our recent history and from our national movement and its development and from various ideals we have proclaimed."

OBJECTIVES OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy makers set out certain objectives before they proceed to lay down basic principles and formulate the policy. Several of these objectives are common, though the degree of emphasis always varies. A former foreign secretary of India, Muchkund Dubey wrote: "The primary purpose of any country's foreign policy is to promote its national interest- to ensure its security, safeguard its sovereignty, contribute to its growth and prosperity and generally enhance its stature, influence and role in the comity of nations. A country's foreign

policy should also be able to serve broader purpose of promoting peace, disarmament and development and of establishing a stable, fair and equitable global order.”

PRINCIPLES OF INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

The major principles of India’s foreign policy can be traced to policies pursued by Indian National Congress during the pre-independence period. Shortly after independence Indian National Congress met at Jaipur session and made it clear that, “The foreign policy of India must necessarily be based on the principles that have guided the congress in the past years. These principles are promotion of world peace, the freedom of all nations, racial equality and ending of imperialism and colonialism. It should be the constant of the foreign policy of India to maintain friendly and cooperative relations with all nations and to avoid entanglement in military or similar alliances which tend to divide up the world in rival groups and thus endanger the world.”

Principles of India’s foreign policy are

- 1) Non-Alignment.
- 2) Panchsheel and Peaceful co-existence.
- 3) Opposition to Racial Discrimination.
- 4) Foreign Economic Aid and India’s Independent policy.
- 5) Support to the United Nations.
- 6) Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes.

INDIA’S TIES WITH BANGLADESH DURING UPA GOVERNMENT: AREAS OF COOPERATION AND CHALLENGES

COOPERATION IN COUNTER-TERRORISM

Over the years the war against terrorism and its causes have come to be viewed as collective effort of all members of the international community. International terrorism cannot be fought unless we cooperate. India and Bangladesh reiterated that the territory of either side would not be allowed for activities inimical to other and resolved not to allow their respective territory to be used for training, sanctuary and other operations by domestic or foreign terrorist and insurgent organizations and their operatives. Both countries also rejected extremism, violence and terrorism and agreed to cooperate proactively in combating these evils. Indian counter-terrorism efforts were provided a major boost, when Sheikh Hasina responded to Indian security concerns and began clamping down on anti-India terror outfits operating out of Bangladesh territory. Both governments have worked together on security issues and reaffirmed their unequivocal and uncompromising position against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including insurgency. Both India and Bangladesh have positively responded each other to counter the terrorism in the area and transcend the narrow bounds of security cooperation and focus on other bilateral issues in their relationship.

ALL ROUND PROGRESS

1. High-level exchange visits and meetings take place regularly alongside the wide ranging people-to-people interaction. On January 12, 2010 Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was conferred the prestigious Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2009 at the Rashtrapati Bhawan.
2. India and Bangladesh have signed three agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, transfer of sentenced persons and combating international terrorism, organised crime and illegal drug trafficking, a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in power sector and a cultural exchange programme. India announced to Bangladesh a line of credit of US\$ 1 billion for a range of projects pertaining to railway sector, procurement of buses and dredging of rivers and supply 250 MW electricity from its grid. Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Finance Minister visited Dhaka on August 7, 2010 and signed the US\$ 1 billion Line of Credit Agreement between EXIM Bank of India and Government of Bangladesh.
3. Bangladesh is an important trading partner for India. In 2008-09, Bangladesh imported US\$ 2.841 billion and exported US\$ 276.58 million to India. On the economic assistance side, India has extended a line of credit of US\$ 1 billion to Bangladesh for a range of projects, including railway infrastructure, supply of BG locomotives and passenger coaches, procurement of buses and dredging projects. India was

constructing 2,800 core shelters in the affected villages in Bagerhat district in southern Bangladesh. India offers 100 slot under ITEC and 35 slots under Technical Cooperation Scheme of Colombo Plan every year to Bangladesh. In the last three years (2006-07 to 2009-10), 414 participants from Bangladesh have undergone training in India under ITEC Programme and Technical Cooperation scheme of Colombo Plan.

4. In order to promote people to people exchanges, hundred scholarships are being granted by ICCR every year to students from Bangladesh for pursuing general courses in arts, sciences, engineering and also specialised courses for culture, drama, music, fine arts and sports etc. During Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit in January 2010, India has offered to provide 300 more scholarships annually for five years to students from Bangladesh for studying and training in Universities and training institutions in India.
5. Both the Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh recognised that poverty eradication and ensuring food security were great challenges to both the countries. They also recognized the need to give added focus on rural development policies, transfer and diffusion of technology and development, in particular to enhance agricultural productivity. Both countries have also opened in Balamari (Kurigram)-Kalaichar (West Garo Hills) and another one is proposed in Balat (East Khasi Hills)-Dalora (Sunamgani). This is a fulfilment of the long standing demand of the local people of the area and it is hoped that the resulting economic activity would contribute to the economic upliftment of the people of the area surrounding the border haats.

AGREEMENTS SIGNED

During the Indian Prime Minister visit to Dhaka in 2011, the major documents signed in the course of the visit involved the Framework Agreement, Land Boundary Agreement and a number of Memorandas OF Understanding was also inked.

a)Framework Agreement

The framework agreement on cooperation for development was a tone setter. It recalled the two shared bonds of history, culture and values. It contained 12 points providing the template for future bilateral cooperation on a wide range of areas. These included, water sharing, trade facilitation and connectivity, sub-regional cooperation, environment protection, information sharing and security issues.

b)A Protocol on Land Boundary

Manmohan Singh visited Dhaka in early September 2011. During Singh's visit, a protocol to the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement was signed 'to address all outstanding land boundary issues and provide a final settlement to the India-Bangladesh boundary. The protocol included the settlement of the demarcation of the land boundary and transfer of adversely possessed land in the border.

c)Memorandas of Understanding (MoUs)

A large number of Memorandas of Understanding (MoUs) were signed during the Indian Prime Minister visit to Bangladesh in 2011; a number of Memorandums of understanding were signed in a bid to institutionalize cooperation between India and Bangladesh. These were on renewable energy, facilitating Overland Transit Traffic between Bangladesh and Nepal, conservation of the Sunderbans as also of the Royal Bengal tigers, cooperation in the field of fisheries, educational cooperation between the Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Dhaka University, academic cooperation between National Institute of Fashion Technology, India and BGMEA Institute of Fashion and Technology, Bangladesh, and cooperation between Doordarshan and Bangladesh Television.

LARGEST ONE-TIME BILATERAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE BY INDIA

In 2010, India offered a US\$ 1 billion line of credit to Bangladesh which is the largest ever one-time bilateral financial assistance by India to any country. It underlined India's resolve to spur the economic development of Bangladesh. The credit line will be used for the construction of railway bridges and lines, supply of locomotive coaches and buses. This decision is significant in Indo-Bangladesh relations. It has been welcomed by a large

section of the people of Bangladesh, including business leaders and intellectuals. It is believed that enhanced economic ties could lead to the dawn of a new era in regional cooperation.

BOOSTING REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

To boost the intra-SAARC trade and for greater engagements with the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) of SAARC, India has unilaterally decided to reduce its negative list of trade products with reference to the LDCs of SAARC. The LDCs in the SAARC are Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. Intra-regional trade amongst the SAARC countries stands at \$20 billion in 2009. India is expecting to take it up to about \$40 billion by 2011-13. India has so far reduced import duties to zero on all items other than those in the negative list for LDCs. In this context, Bangladesh welcomed India's initiative to provide duty-free access to SAARC LDCs to the Indian market. Bangladesh also welcomed the reduction of the number of items from India's negative list that were of direct interest to Bangladesh and requested for further reduction in the list.

REMOVAL OF TARIFF AND NON-TARIFF BARRIERS

For encouraging imports from Bangladesh, both countries agreed to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers and port restrictions and facilitate movement of cargo by rail and water. The Free Trade Agreement talk is expected to gain momentum after the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Delhi which would open up duty-free export of garments, leather, jute and ceramic products from Bangladesh and helpful in reducing the trade deficit of Bangladesh.

Clearly, over the last decade, both the countries have witnessed a qualitative transformation in virtually all areas of bilateral cooperation making the relationship a truly multi-faceted one. But as in many such relationships, there are continued challenges to overcome too.

CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL CONCERNS

India and Bangladesh share a 4094 km border with India contiguous to Bangladesh on three sides. Such proximity has contributed to hostilities in the past, and both sides need to resolve certain issues in order for the relationship to move forward.

TRADE

Trade has always been an irritant in India-Bangladesh relations. The unfavourable trade deficit for Bangladesh and a number of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade on the Indian side has caused significant resentment amongst Bangladeshi's, who believe that India has devised numerous trade barriers that deny mutually beneficial trade. The unrecorded trade between the two nations adds to the trade deficit, and the potential loss of customs duties is a major problem for Bangladesh due to the volume of illegal goods flowing into the country. The greater part of this trade is characterised as quasi legal or informal, and involves the participation of locals living along the border area who usually bypass the customs posts or work in collusion with anti-smuggling agencies. Over the past few years both countries have agreed to work together on the issue of removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers with the aim of facilitating greater trade ties.

WATER SHARING

It has been argued by many security experts that water shall become a major source of conflict in the 21st century. The contemporary scenario in India-Bangladesh relations reflects to an extent this dismal truth. Water sharing remains the critical element in shaping of India- Bangladesh ties, with the Teesta River disputes and the proposed construction of the Tipaimukh dam at the centre of the controversy. The 1983 Teesta River Agreement allows India and Bangladesh to share 75 percent of the river water on a 39 and 36 percent basis. During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Bangladesh in 2011, it was announced that India would share the remaining 25 percent of the river water on a 50:50 basis. However, the announcement was met by stiff opposition from Mamata Banerjee and therefore India refrained from signing the agreement. Recent foreign secretary level talks between India and Bangladesh have revealed that internal discussion within the government are taking place on

the Teesta issue. Simultaneously, India's intention to build the Tipaimukh hydroelectric project is also bringing in some tension in its bilateral relations with Bangladesh. While it is impossible for India and Bangladesh to unanimously agree on all bilateral issues, it is important that water sharing does not adversely affect the broad-spectrum of Indo-Bangladesh ties.

TRANSIT ACCESS

One of the biggest casualties of India and Bangladesh not seeing eye to eye in the water sharing issues has been the issues of transit rights for India. The two countries were supposed to sign an agreement in 2011 allowing transit access to India. However, with India holding back on the Teesta issue, Bangladesh decided not to go forward and sign the agreement. Transit access through Bangladesh would be hugely beneficial for India and would significantly reduce transport time and costs between India and its Northeastern states, with Bangladesh profiting in millions of dollars through transit fees. The issue of granting transit right to India has been a controversial affair in Bangladesh, with many in the country arguing that India will take advantage of the transit access to more easily transport its military personnel to its far flung border across Arunachal Pradesh. Having reached an impasse on certain interconnected issues and unable to fashion solutions in single domains, relations between India and Bangladesh on this issue remain in a deadlock.

BORDER PROBLEM

India and Bangladesh share a land-border of 4,096 kilometres and a maritime border of 180 km. The non-demarcation of a 6.5 km land border along the Comilla-Tripura makes the border question unresolved. India's reluctance towards this issue is attributed to the concerns of the Hindus living in the lands likely to go to Bangladesh after demarcation. Its inability to find an alternative site to relocate the Hindu population is the major stumbling block in resolving this issue. As long as the question of demarcation is not resolved, India would be unable to ratify the Indra-Mujib agreement of 1974 which laid the basis for Indo-Bangladeshi friendship. The river borders pose a different kind of problems because the shifting river routes, soil erosion or frequent floods make it difficult to demarcate borders, especially when they form numerous islands and chars. River border lines tend to change course periodically leading to a host of disputes, associated with the difficulties in establishing ownership of the newly created territories, for example in the 1980s controversies surrounding sovereignty over New Moore island (South Talpatty) dominated Indo-Bangladeshi relations. The Enclave problems form the third component of the border dispute. An enclave is a portion of one state completely surrounded by the territory of another state. Presently there are about 250 enclaves surviving in the world and they are found mainly in three areas Western Europe, the fringes of the former Soviet empire and South Asia. But the majority of world's enclaves can be found in a small section of the Indo-Bangladesh border land. Non-demarcation of land borders, changing nature of the maritime border or the disputes over non-exchange of enclaves are serious irritants in Indo-Bangladeshi relations. They also generate a whole range of associated disputes and conflicts which make the border question prominent on the agenda of bilateral relations.

ILLEGAL MIGRATION

The flow of migrants across Bangladesh boundary due to unstable condition in Bangladesh has also caused tension between the two countries. Large influx of such migrants across the boundary has posed socio-economic-political problems for the people of Indian states bordering Bangladesh Viz, Tripura, Mizoram, Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal. India has completed around 1357 kilometre fencing of the international border with plan to prevent illegal migration. Cooperative measures like joint patrolling of the border areas, consular access to prisons and signing of an extradition treaty are on the verge of materializing as steps to increase vigil to check drug and arms trafficking as well as illegal immigration, especially the trafficking women and children.

INSURGENCY

Insurgency is one of the bones of contention between two countries. The question of ISI operating from Bangladesh and supporting the insurgents in the North-East is one of the major issues. In this way, India has been accusing Dhaka of facilitating, encouraging and supporting various North-east insurgent groups. These groups

have been exploiting cross border ethnic linkages. A favorable terrain helps various insurgent groups' manage seeking secure and safe havens in contiguous Bangladeshi territories. The emergence of military rule in Bangladesh re-established the old link between Pakistan's ISI and the northeast insurgency. Though action was taken by Bangladesh against indigenous militant organisations having link with Pakistan based terror groups. During Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in January 2010 two countries concluded agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, transfer of sentenced persons and combating international terrorism. Bangladesh's cooperation to India's fight against terrorism was well recognized by none other than Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. While addressing media in Dhaka on September 6, 2011, he conveyed India's deep appreciation for the cooperation rendered by Bangladesh in their joint fight against terrorism and insurgency.

FUTURE PROSPECTS- LOOKING AHEAD

India and Bangladesh are keen on resolving differences. They must therefore speed up all efforts to move forward on key issues. The following suggestions can be considered as a rough guide map of rapprochement.

- a. Agreement on water sharing should be given priority. Early resolution of the Teesta issue is necessary.
- b. India should give prominence to the ratification of land boundary agreement.
- c. Security cooperation between the two countries has been good. But there is need for institutionalizing this cooperation so that it does not remain restricted to the tenure of a particular government in either country. In this regard, a beginning could be made by signing the bilateral extradition treaty.
- d. There is need for addressing the issue of illegal migration. In this regard innovative measures should be taken to resolve the problem.
- e. People-to-people contact needs to be encouraged.
- f. Trade relationship has improved significantly between the two countries. The two countries should now consider an agreement on non-tariff barriers.
- g. Progress can be made by cooperating on common challenges like disaster management, food and energy security.
- h. Connectivity should be given top most priority. Both the countries should work together to operationalize it.

CONCLUSION

India-Bangladesh relations over the years reflect the prominence of coercive elements in India's hegemonic role in South Asia. This perception will affect the development of long term institutional relationships with smaller neighbours of South Asia. This was clearly reflected in India's aversion towards multilateral cooperation frameworks like SAARC and the lack of reciprocation in trade and economic cooperation with countries, as seen with Bangladesh. The last decade has seen a new development in India's foreign policy. The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government have sought to improve political relations and deepen economic partnerships with neighbouring countries. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's landmark visit to India in 2010 was followed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh calling on Dhaka in September 2011. These visits unveiled a sweeping agenda for the transformation of bilateral relations by committing the two leaders to resolve all major outstanding issues left behind since the partition. The recent improvement in relations between India and Bangladesh suggests, there is a growing realisation that increased cooperation will bring substantial socio-economic benefits that can no longer be overlooked. India is committed to work with the government of Bangladesh to open new vistas in bilateral relations. Both countries need each other in the current regional and global environment. So, both countries must look forward with a constructive spirit to develop bilateral relations which may help in making South Asia stable and secure.

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