

# India-Bangladesh Relations: Issues, Problems and Recent Developments

India's links with Bangladesh are civilisational, cultural, social and economic. There is much that unites the two countries – a shared history and common heritage, linguistic and cultural ties, passion for music, literature and the arts. With Bangladesh, India shares not only a common history of struggle for freedom and liberation but also enduring feelings of both fraternal as well as familial ties.<sup>1</sup>

Though India played the great role in emergence of Independent Bangladesh, was one of the first country to recognize Bangladesh as separate state. However, there are several main issues such as illegal migration, insurgency, border, water disputes, and dispute over issue of Moore Island etc. These have been major issues which are impacted on these two countries relations.

## **Illegal migration:**

Illegal migration is one of the bones of the contention of these two countries, Since the 1971 war of independence that created the state of Bangladesh, millions of Bangladeshi immigrants (the vast majority of them illegal) have poured into neighbouring India. While the Indian government has tried to deport some of these immigrants, the sheer number of them, as well as the porous border between the two countries, has made such an enterprise impossible. It is difficult to assess how many illegal immigrants are currently residing in India. Consider that in 1971, during the civil war in neighboring East Pakistan (the former name of Bangladesh), at least 10-million Bangladeshis poured into West Bengal in India.<sup>2</sup>

Illegal migration appears in the eastern and north-eastern parts of the country from neighbouring Bangladesh, threat to India's internal security, from Bangladesh is impacted on communal, political, social and economic tensions and conflicts in several areas of the northeast of India. The most affected states are West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Bihar, and Tripura, although migrants "have spread to far off states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Delhi." Although the exact figure is not known, it is estimated that there are about 15-20 million Bangladeshis staying illegally in India.

The National Investigation Agency has found links with Pakistan in rackets engaged in printing and smuggling fake currency into India. NIA sources said fake currency was now

being smuggled into the border with Bangladesh has gaps at some points and immigrants cross into India on foot through the breaks in the fence. Some also swim across rivers on the border to reach India. The National Investigation Agency has found links with Pakistan in rackets India through its porous border with Bangladesh. Malda district in West Bengal is a key transit point for counterfeiters. Once they reach India, immigrants obtain fake documents through local agents. Political leaders in parts of West Bengal were also involved in endorsing fake documents such as ration cards for illegal immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

This unfettered illegal migration impacts on national security and socio-economic stability. Intelligence inputs indicate that the Inter Service Intelligence Agency (ISI) of Pakistan is utilising these migrants as conduits to ferry in terrorists and arms into India. Counterfeit Indian currency with its origins in Bangladesh has flooded border areas, crippling in these parts.

Vote bank politics in Assam is the one of obstacle to control illegal migration from Bangladesh, led to communal violence between indigenous Bodos and Muslims (migrants from Bangladesh) in 2012.

The illegal Bangladeshi immigrants have not only changed the demography and disturbed the ecology of the north-east but have also encouraged them to exercise their political rights in India as citizens. It has been one of the key reasons for the rise of insurgent groups in the north-east as some of the insurgent groups like Assam Gana Sangram Parishad started, and got support of the masses, because of the issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh. At the same time the immigration laws (Illegal Migrants [Determined by Tribunal] (IMDT) Act 1983) followed in Assam has aided illegal immigrants' settling in the north-east easy.<sup>4</sup>

## **Insurgency**

Insurgency has been plying the role in straining relations of India with Bangladesh. Northeast India has been facing insurgency since 1956 due to feelings of ethnic separatism among its inhabitants. ISI is operating from Bangladesh, supporting the insurgents in the North east India. National Liberation of Tripura (NLFT), Liberation Front of Assam(ULFA) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFM) are major insurgent groups in Northeast India. There are some rumours that ULFA has several lucrative income generating Projects in Bangladesh to sustain its insurgency activities in India<sup>5</sup>. In 1999, Porous border was used by Insurgency groups.

## **Border Disputes**

India's land border with Bangladesh as per the Ministry of Defence is 4351 km. running through five states, viz., West Bengal (2217kms), Assam (262 kms), Meghalaya (443kms), Tripura (856 kms) and Mizoram (318 kms), including nearly 781 kms of riverine border. The border traverses through 25 districts.

The border is used as a route for smuggling livestock, food items, medicines and drugs from India to Bangladesh. Moreover, illegal immigrants from Bangladesh cross the border to India in search of improving their lives. Because of a large number of illegal immigrants crossing from Bangladesh into India, a controversial shoot-on-sight policy has been enforced by the Indian border patrols. This policy was initiated with reports of violence between the illegal migrants and Indian soldiers. The border has also witnessed occasional skirmishes between the Indian Border Security Force and the Border Guards Bangladesh, most notably in 2001.<sup>6</sup>

The Agreement on the demarcation of Land Boundary between Bangladesh and India and related matters, signed in May 1974 is a unique document that epitomized the depth of the friendship, goodwill and mutual trust and above all, the vision of peace and harmony of two great statesmen, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and Smt. Indira Gandhi. This comprehensive agreement was intended to resolve all lingering and vexing problems that history had bequeathed on the two nations.<sup>7</sup> It has not full filled by both Governements

The killing of Bangladeshi nationals by Border Security Force (BSF) has become a major irritant between the two countries in the recent past. It has evoked strong public sentiments in Bangladesh. According to a report of Bangladesh Human Rights Watch organization Odhikar, BSF has, from January 1, 2001 to March 31, 2012, killed 907 Bangladeshis. Bangladesh wants no time lost in stopping these killings.<sup>8</sup>

During the State visit of the Prime Minister to Bangladesh in September 2011, a "Protocol to the Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Bangladesh Concerning the Demarcation of the Land Boundary Between India and Bangladesh and Related Matters (LBA)" was signed. It settles the long outstanding land boundary issues related to undemarcated segment of 6.1 Kms; territories in adverse possession; and exchange of enclaves. The Cabinet has, on 13 February 2013, approved the draft of a Constitution (Amendment) Bill for implementing the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) 1974 and the Protocol to LBA signed in 2011. The Protocol envisages that 111 Indian Enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladesh Enclaves in India, as per the jointly verified cadastral enclave maps, shall be exchanged. As per Article 3 of the LBA 1974, when the Enclaves are transferred, people living in these areas shall be given the right of staying on where they are as nationals of the State to which the areas are transferred.<sup>9</sup>

## **Water Disputes**

Sharing of Ganges water is the one of the source of conflict between India and Bangladesh. This conflict between two countries was arose when India India decided to construction Farakka barrage to divert water from Ganges to Hoogly River (in India).

Ganga is a trans-boundary river of India and Bangladesh. The 2,525 km (1,569 mi) river rises in the western Himalayas in the Indian state of Uttarakhand, and flows south and east through the Gangetic Plain of North India into Bangladesh, where it empties into the Bay of Bengal. It is the second largest river on the Indian-subcontinent by discharge.

The aim of construction of the Farakka Barrage was to increase the lean period flow of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly branch of Ganga to increase the water depth at the Kolkata port which was threatened by siltation. As irrigation withdrawals increased in Bangladesh, dispute arose between India and Bangladesh over the sharing of the lean season flow at Farakka. The inadequacy of water during the lean season to meet the assessed demands in the two countries is the root cause of the conflict.

The Bangladesh government feels that the reduction in flow caused damage to agriculture, industry and ecology in the basin in Bangladesh. The government of India feels that such misgivings are misplaced. Because of the inability of the concerned governments to come to any lasting agreement over the last few decades on sharing the river water, this problem has grown and now it is also viewed as a case of upstream-downstream dispute.



Fig: River Ganga

In the relationship between India and Bangladesh, the dispute over Ganga water was an important component for over two decades. In 1977, the two countries reached a five-year agreement on water sharing which was signed in November 1977. However, the basic issues remained un-solved and hence, the agreement was not renewed and lapsed in 1982. Later, a proposal was mooted by India to augment the flow of Ganga at Farakka by constructing a barrage across the Brahmaputra at Jogighopa in India and transfer water to Farakka through a canal. A proposal from Bangladesh was to construct a series of reservoirs on the tributaries of Ganga in Nepal. But this would have brought Nepal also in the picture. None of these proposals could be implemented.

According to the Bangladesh view of this dispute, there was a “unilateral diversion” of the waters of the Ganga by India at Farakka to the detriment of Bangladesh and the resulting reduction in flows had severe adverse effects on Bangladesh. It was also projected that this was a case of a large and more powerful country disregarding the interests of a small and weaker neighbour. This has been one topic on which there has been complete unanimity in Bangladesh. Sentiments grew to such an extent that India was projected as being responsible for all water related disasters, whether drought or floods and the Farakka project was supposed to be the cause behind all water related problems.<sup>10</sup>

The perceptions on the Indian side were entirely different. Ganga River is closely intertwined with the religious and social life of the people. Also important are the legitimate needs of the Kolkata Port in the light of siltation and growth of future traffic.

It was felt that Bangladesh had greatly overstated its water needs and its claim was disproportionate to its fair share by any logic. Regarding diversion of water for the Kolkata port through the Farakka Barrage, the view was that Bangladesh had magnified the adverse effects due to reduced flows and it was unfair on their part to blame India for flood problem. A further complication was the feeling on the parts of the concerned State Governments in India that their interests had not been properly addressed by the Central Government during bilateral talks with Bangladesh. For several years after 1990, there was a virtual stalemate between the two governments on this issue.

Finally, an agreement was reached and a Treaty on the sharing of Ganga water between India and Bangladesh was signed on 12 December 1996. The Ganga Water treaty is cited as one of the important examples of peaceful negotiations between upstream and downstream neighbours in South Asia.

According to Agreement the amount of water India should release at the Farakka barrage in the dry season of January to May every year. The 1996 treaty provides for sharing the water on a 50:50 rotation basis. Each country is allowed 35,000 cubic feet per second (cusecs), or 991 cubic meters per second, leaving the rest of the flow to the other country for a 10-day rotation. When the water flow to the Farakka falls below 60,000 cusecs - it has fallen below this mark since February - the treaty provides for immediate consultation. Although the water flow at Farakka has been low, the two countries have alternately been getting their 35,000 cusecs.<sup>11</sup>

Sharing of Teesta water is the another of cause of irritating in Indo – Bangladesh Relations. In 2011, Manmohan singh, Prime minister visited Bangladesh to resolve Teesta water dispute. It has not resolved due to objection which was raised by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who has expressed her unhappiness about equally sharing of Teesta waters.<sup>12</sup>

### **New Moore island Controversy:**

The Island formed by deposition of sandbars unexpectedly surfaced in the Bay of Bengal in the wake of Bhola cyclone in 1970. Bhola was the deadliest tropical storm in recorded history, killing an estimated 500,000 people, and it catalyzed the Bangladesh war of independence from West Pakistan, which was deeply implicated in its ineffective response to the disaster.<sup>13</sup>

The island was located in the coastal, shallow Bay of Bengal immediately south of the international border river, the Hariabhanga, flowing between Satkhira district of Bangladesh and the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, India, at 21°37'00"N 89°08'30"E. It is now under the waves of the Bay of Bengal.<sup>14</sup>

India and Bangladesh both claimed the empty New Moore Island, which was about 2 miles long and 1.5 miles wide. Bangladesh referred to the island as South Talpatti.

For nearly 30 years, India and Bangladesh have argued over control of a tiny New Moore Island. There were no permanent structures on New Moore, but India sent some paramilitary soldiers to New Moore Island to hoist its national flag. Now rising sea levels have resolved the dispute for them: the island has gone because it has submerged. Its disappearance has been confirmed by satellite imagery.<sup>15</sup>

### **Recent Developments in Indo-Bangladesh Relations:**

At present time, as per sources of ministry of external affairs ministry, there has been progress in Indo- Bangladesh relations, held recent high level contacts to develop the relations between these two countries. With Bangladesh, India shares not only a common history of struggle for freedom and liberation but also enduring feelings of both fraternal as well as familial ties

This commonality is reflected in multi-dimensional relations with Bangladesh at several levels of interaction. High-level exchanges, visits and meetings take place regularly alongside the wide ranging people-to-people interaction. India's Missions in Bangladesh issue about half a million visas every year and thousands of Bangladeshi students study in India on self-financing basis and are recipients of over one hundred annual GOI scholarships.

#### ***Recent High Level Contacts:***

Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh accompanied by EAM, Chief Ministers of 4 States (Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram) neighbouring Bangladesh, and an official & media delegation visited Dhaka on September 6-7, 2011 at the invitation of PM Sheikh Hasina. Ten Agreements/ Protocols/MOUs including a Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development and Protocol to the Agreement concerning demarcation of the Land Boundary between India and Bangladesh were signed. PM announced the commencement of unfettered 24-hour access across the Tin Bigha corridor to Dahagram and

Angorpota enclaves as well as duty-free import of 46 textile items (subsequently expanded to all items, except 25) from Bangladesh. Earlier Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina accompanied by a 123-member delegation had paid a State visit to India from January 10-13, 2010. The Prime Ministers of the two countries agreed to put in place a comprehensive framework of cooperation for development of the two countries based on their mutually shared vision for the future. A Joint Communiqué issued during the visit outlined various initiatives.

Union Minister for Power Shri Sushil Kumar Shinde visited Bangladesh on September 15-16, 2011 to attend the 4th SAARC Energy Ministers' Conference held in Dhaka. On the sidelines of the Conference, he had a bilateral meeting with Adviser(Energy) to PM Tawfique Elahi Chowdhury and BD State Minister for Power Mohd. Enamul Huq and discussed import of 250MW power from India and establishment of a 1,320MW coal-based power plant at Bagerhat, Khulna. Bangladesh Home Minister Advocate Shahara Khatun and Adviser(Int'l relations) to PM Dr. Gowher Rizvi, along with an official delegation, visited India to attend the second Home Ministers' meeting on February 24-25, 2012.

Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Finance Minister visited Dhaka on May 5-6, 2012 to attend the Concluding ceremony of the year-long Joint Celebrations of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. During the visit, FM announced conversion of US\$200 million as grant from the USD 1 billion LOC for projects prioritized by Bangladesh. Minister of Law & Justice and Minority Affairs Salman Khurshid visited Bangladesh from May 24-27, 2012 and led a delegation of three M.P.s and senior officials to participate in the Joint Celebrations of the 90th Anniversary of publication of 'Bidrohi' by Kazi Nazrul Islam.

The first meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission was held on May 7, 2012 in New Delhi. EAM and Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni and their respective delegations discussed all bilateral matters and assess progress of implementation of the 2011 Joint Statement and 2010 Joint Communiqué. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mohamed Mijarul Quayes visited New Delhi on July 24, 2012 for Foreign Office Consultations and held discussions on the entire gamut of bilateral issues. He also called on External Affairs Minister and National Security Adviser and met Water Resources Secretary during this visit.

Rural Development and Drinking Water & Sanitation Minister Jairam Ramesh visited Bangladesh from August 4-6, 2012 to attend an International Conference on "People's Empowerment and Development. During his visit, he called on PM Sheikh Hasina and met with Environment & Forests Minister, Agriculture Minister and Health Minister of Bangladesh.

### ***Sharing of River Waters:***

India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers. The Ganga Waters Treaty was signed on December 12, 1996 for water sharing of river Ganga during lean season (January 1-May 31). The 37th Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) meeting was held in New Delhi from March 17-20,

2010. In the last technical level meeting held in Kolkata in February 2012, both sides exchanged data Dalia in Bangladesh and Gazaldoba in India.

### ***Bilateral Trade:***

Bangladesh is an important trading partner for India. The two-way trade in FY 2010-2011 was US\$5.099 billion with India's exports to Bangladesh accounting for US\$ 4.586 billion and imports US \$ 0.512 million.

### ***Institutional mechanism:***

Some of the important institutional mechanisms that meet periodically to discuss bilateral issues include Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) and Joint Economic Commission (JEC) at Ministerial level, Foreign Office Consultations, Home, Commerce and Water Resources Secretary level talks, BSF-BDR DG-level border coordination conference, Joint Working Group on Security (JWG), Joint Boundary Working Group (JBWG), Joint Working Group on Trade (JWG), Joint Group of Customs Officials (JGC), Protocol Renewal Committee and Standing Committee to review implementation of Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade, and Inter- Governmental Railway Meeting. 14th Meeting of the BIWTA was held in Goa wherein the bilateral protocol was renewed for one year till March 31, 2012. The Standing Committee on IWTT met in Dhaka on February 12-13, 2012. Following the Commerce Secretary Level Talks held in New Delhi on March 28-29, 2012, the India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement was renewed for three years. Pursuant to the Shipping Secretary Talks held on July 2-3, 2012, the bilateral Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade was renewed for two years till March 31, 2014. India has also agreed to pay Tk 100 million every year for maintaining two river routes viz. Doikhawa-Sirajganj and Zakiganj-Sherpur.

### ***India's Economic Assistance to Bangladesh:***

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. The Line of Credit Agreement was signed in Dhaka on August 7, 2010 between EXIM Bank of India and Government of Bangladesh. India has stood by Bangladesh in its hour of need with aid worth over Taka 250 crore (over US \$ 37 million) to help it cope with natural disasters and floods in 2007-08 including supply of 1,000 MT of skimmed milk powder, and 40,000 MT of rice. India has completed and handed over 2,649 core shelters in the affected villages in Bagerhat district in southern Bangladesh.

### ***Technical Cooperation :***



January 29 2012, NTPC and BPDB signed an agreement to set up a Joint Venture for the establishment of a 1320MW coal-based power plant in Bagerhat district, Khulna at an estimated cost of \$1.5 billion and is expected to be commissioned by 2016. Scholarships and training programmers under ITEC, TCS of Colombo Plan, ICCR, AYUSH, Commonwealth, SAARC and IOR-ARC scholarships/ fellowship schemes are being offered to Bangladesh nationals. India offers 100 slots 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 underwent training in India under ITEC Programme and Technical Cooperation Scheme of Colombo Plan. Muktijoddha Scholarship Scheme extended by the Government of India to Higher Secondary-level students (200 scholarships) and Graduate-level students (478 scholarships). Three Bangladesh Diplomats were imparted training at Foreign Service Institute, New Delhi in 2011.

**Cultural Exchanges:** Given the shared history and commonality of language, cultural exchanges form an important bond of friendship between the people of two countries. Special emphasis has been laid on promotion of exchanges in the fields of music, theatre, art, painting, books, etc. A bilateral Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) 2009-2012 provides the framework for such exchanges. To promote bilateral cultural exchanges, the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) of Indian Council for Cultural Relations was inaugurated at Dhaka on March 11, 2010. Secretary, Ministry of Culture visited Bangladesh from December 19-22, 2010 and Bangladesh Culture Secretary visited India on April 6-8, 2011 for holding talks on joint celebrations of 150th anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. The joint inaugural ceremonies were held in Dhaka on 6 May and New Delhi on 7 May 2011 and year-long celebrations are underway. Government of Bangladesh held a grand ceremony in the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, Dhaka on March 27, 2012 to honour the foreign friends of Bangladesh for their contribution to the 1971 Liberation War. Out of a total of 135 foreign friends, 45 Indian friends/institutions were also conferred the Liberation War Honour and Friends of Liberation War Honour by the President and Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

At the invitation of EAM, a 21-member cultural delegation from the Departments of Theatre and Music of the University of Dhaka led by the Vice Chancellor of the Dhaka University, Prof. A.A.M.S. Arefin Siddique visited India on a goodwill visit from August 22-27, 2011. During the visit, Prof. Siddique called on EAM and discussed ways and means to consolidate cultural exchange between India and Bangladesh through student-teacher exchange programmes and reciprocal programmes of cooperation.

In order to promote people to people exchanges, one hundred scholarships are being granted by ICCR every year to students from Bangladesh for pursuing general courses in arts, sciences, engineering and also specialized courses for culture, drama, music, fine arts and sports, etc. During Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina's visit in January 2010, India has offered to provide 300 scholarships annually for five years to students from Bangladesh for studying and training in Universities and training institutions in India

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