

India Bangladesh Relations During N.Modi's Govt.: A Historical Study

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Abstract: India-Bangladesh relationship have witnessed significant upswing over the last decades. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit during 6-7 June 2015 to Bangladesh has ushered in a new era a significant way and has fruitful on multiple fronts. A significant numbers of agreements and MoUs were signed covering two countries border, trade, investment, connectivity, infrastructure development, etc. This visit was seen as a watershed moment for the already warm relations between the two neighboring countries due to the recent passing of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) by the Indian Parliament on May 7, 2015 was a noteworthy initiative of India and the promises for greater cooperation the visit held. In this visit, both the countries have signed agreements, three protocols, 14 memorandums of understanding and one letter of consent covered varied areas of cooperation: economic, trade and investment, security, infrastructure development, education, Science and Technology, ICT. None was disappointed as the two countries signed a number of agreements to further strengthen cooperation in a number of areas. Fruitful discussions were held in other areas of contention with the promises of resolution soon.

Keywords: India-Bangladesh, relations, Narendra Modi's Bangladesh policy, India, Bangladesh, BJP, Awami League, Agreement, Boundary.

India-Bangladesh relationship: A Brief Account

Relations between Delhi and Dhaka were initially warm especially in the context of India's supportive role in Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971. However, bilateral relations began fraying in 1975 when its pro-India President, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founding father, was assassinated. India-Bangladesh relations experienced ups and downs throughout history that has often been defined as an 'enigma'.¹

Historic Land Boundary Agreement (LBA)

Historically, Bangladesh-India shares an approximately 4,096.7 km-long land boundary and the disputed area is approximately 6.1 km. If one looks at the historical developments of this land boundary disputer certain landmarks are noticeable.

For instance, to resolve the dispute in 16 May 1974 India-Bangladesh signed the agreement. Finally during then the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka

in September 2011 Bangladesh and India signed protocol to the Land Boundary Agreement. though the world

did not witness its ratification. Due to the ratification of the LBA, primarily three complex and sensitive issues have been resolved between India-Bangladesh relations. That is, (i) the exchange of enclaves between the countries; (ii) the exchange of adverse possessions of each other's territories; and (iii) the demarcation of 6.5 km of boundary³. Furthermore, this territorial dispute resolution. however, can be an opportunity to increase connectivity and economic cooperation. The territorial questions resolved, India and Bangladesh have an opportunity to turn their long land boundary and their vast maritime spaces into zones 'of expansive economic co-operation'. This can also work as a catalyst to promote cooperation.⁴

The agreement simplifies and clarifies the status and rights of the 52,000 people living in enclaves on both sides of the border. As a result of this agreement, residents of about 200 border enclaves, 106 on the India side and 92 on the Bangladesh side, will have the right to stay where they are or move to the other side of the border with full rights and privileges accruing to citizens of both countries.

Power Co-operation:

During the visit, the two countries signed the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade Agreement (Renewal). The renewal extends the previous protocol for 5 years which expired on March 31, 2015. Both sides can extend it further as per mutual

understanding. The speciality about the amendment is that the new agreement will allow Bangladesh the use of channels for trade with other countries like Nepal and Bhutan. The trade route between the countries was around 3,000 nautical miles, but the amended protocol makes the direct route around 620 nautical miles, cutting trade costs by nearly 50%.

India will use Bangladesh's soil to transmit 6,000 MW of power from Assam to Bihar via Dinajpur'. In addition, it was reported that India 'has made a move to facilitate integrated power grid for SAARC member states to begin cross-border trading on the Indian Energy Exchange (IEx)'.⁵ At the beginning stage, there will be short-term buying and selling of power with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, since India has grid connectivity with these countries. During his visit to Bangladesh, Narendra Modi promised that in accordance with your [Bangladesh's] laws and regulation. We can do more together in power sector, here and in India'.⁶ The former Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Veena Sikri, views this power cooperation as a "unique example' and expects that 'power grid connectivity and the resultant energy cooperation between Bangladesh and India is set scale new heights of success".⁷

During the visit of PM Narendra Modi, two Indian power giants struck deals with Bangladesh for building plants producing a combined 4.600 megawatts of electricity in Bangladesh.

Under the deals, separate memorandum of understanding (MoUs) were signed with Reliance Power Limited to develop four units of power plants to produce 3,000 MW of electricity and Adani Power Limited to set up two coal fired plants with a total capacity of 1,600 MW. The gas fired power plants would take 13 months to complete construction after final agreements had been reached. “Both Prime Ministers agreed to cooperate in the field of civil nuclear energy, especially training for technical personnel. 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. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) and Sale Purchase Agreement has been signed between Numaligarh Refinery. Ltd (NRL) of India and Bangladesh Petroleum Cooperation (BPC) for construction of a pipeline from Siliguri, India to Parbatipur, Bangladesh for supply of High Speed Diesel to Bangladesh.

Trade and Investment:

Bangladesh is an important trading partner for India. It was expected that Bangladeshi export to India would be increased with this laudable initiative by Indian Government. But, later on

Bangladesh Government could realize that the businessmen face lots of nontariff barriers (NTBs) while exporting to India. Hon'ble Indian Prime Minister, during recent official visit to Bangladesh has also confessed the high trade imbalance despite duty-free and quota-free (DFQF) access for all but 25 Bangladeshi items in 'India (Islam & Hossain 2015). Now, Bangladesh expects India to remove nontariff barriers (NTBs) as it views NTBs as the major obstacles to its export growth to India. MoUs relating trade were signed between Bangladesh and India during this recent visit of Indian Premier (6-7 June, 2015) like: Bilateral Trade Agreement; renewal of ' Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade; Bilateral Cooperation Agreement between Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and Bureau of Indian Standards (315) on cooperation in the field of standardization; Mail on Indian Special Economic Zone in Bangladesh etc.'

Cooperation over Connectivity

Connectivity is a reality and a means to promote economic prosperity, people-to-people relations and so forth. Establishing connectivity in rail. road and waterways between India and Bangladesh was manifested during Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka through signing a number of agreements. To deepen connectivity launching direct bus services between Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala and Dhaka-Guwahati-Shillong is noticeable. After opening a direct bus

route between Tripura and Bangladesh, a direct rail link is going to be established between India and Bangladesh. Notably, the 15-km long broad gauge rail line from Agartala to Akhaura will provide India's northeastern states a key link to Chittagong ports and large markets in Sylhet and Dhaka. Notably, the Indian Government has sanctioned around 1000 more in July 2015 to materialize the 15-km-long India-Bangladesh railway project. Of the 15 km, 5km falls in Indian territory and the rest in Bangladesh. The 1,650 km distance between Agartala and Kolkata Would be reduced to 515 km once the rail track is constructed through Bangladesh. Furthermore, it is expected that the direct rail connectivity will promote Indo-Bangladesh socio-economic ties to a large extent. It was also argued that the implementation of the agreement will be beneficial to both the countries, since there will be increased economic cooperation and connectivity through sea and river routes.

India-Bangladesh signed a deal on maritime co-operation entitled 'Blue Economy and Maritime Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean', an MoU between Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) of India and University of Dhaka for joint research on oceanography in the bay of Bengal is expected to boost India-Bangladesh maritime cooperation through capacity building, training and joint research collaboration. In this regard, Narendra Modi hopes that

'the agreement on blue economy and maritime cooperation opens a new area of economic opportunities' 10.

Socio-Cultural

Relations:

Though India has strong cultural ties with Bangladesh (Datta, 2008), Hence, 'cultural exchange programs for the years 2015-2017' have been adopted during Modi's visit to Dhaka. As referred earlier, culture is one of the dimensions in modi regime's foreign policy; promotion of socio-cultural relations is noticeable between Delhi and Dhaka during Modi's regime.

With effect from 4 January 2015 the Kolkata-Dhaka-Kolkata 'Maritime Express' has started running one additional round trip each week, Which will now run thrice a week, the Indian High Commission in Bangladesh said. it was expected that M this W1" be imperative in promoting people-w-people contacts

Conclusion:

This research paper has attempted to provide an overview of the recent developments in india-Bangladesh relations under Narendra Modi's regime. In fact, the peaceful ratification of the historic LEA is expected to work as a catalyst to deepen and broaden India-Bangladesh relations. India and Bangladesh needs to be resolved peacefully at the earliest that requires adequate political will, mutual understanding and confidence. It maintains that scholars, from both sides,

must undertake collaborative research projects to innovate possible way out that would engage politicians, bureaucrats and largely common citizens in realizing mutual benefits in proportionate bilateral policy set up.

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