

## India-Bangladesh Bilateral Relations

India-Bangladesh bilateral relations began on a positive note in this year with the exchange of New Year greetings between Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 01 January 2020. The friendly relations were reinforced in the last year with intense high level engagements at political and official level. President of Bangladesh Md. Abdul Hamid attended the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his cabinet members on 30 May 2019. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited New Delhi on an official visit from 03-06 October 2019. Both the Prime Ministers also met in a high level event on celebration of 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on the sidelines of 74<sup>th</sup> session of UN General Assembly in September 2019. Prime Minister Hasina and the Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee jointly inaugurated the historic pink ball test cricket match between India and Bangladesh in Kolkata on 22 November 2019. These high level visits charted the pathway for strengthening the multifaceted partnership between the two countries.

2. The two Prime Ministers jointly inaugurated four bilateral developmental projects in March 2019 in Bangladesh through video-conferencing including (i) supply of 500 trucks, 300 double decker buses and 200 AC buses under the second Line of Credit, (ii) extension of National Knowledge Network to Bangladesh, (iii) establishment of 36 community clinics in five districts of Bangladesh and (iv) establishment of 11 water treatment plants in Bangladesh and another three projects in October 2019 including (i) inauguration of Vivekananda Bhaban at Rama Krishna Mission in Dhaka, (ii) import of bulk LPG from Bangladesh and (iii) inauguration of Bangladesh-India Professional Skill Development Institute (BIPSDI) at the Institution of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh (IDEB), Khulna.

3. The External Affairs Minister of India Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Dhaka in August 2019 and met the Prime Minister and Foreign Ministers of Bangladesh. The Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Information and Broadcasting and Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Minister Prakash Javadekar visited Dhaka in November 2019 to attend the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Governing Council of South Asia Cooperative Environment Program (SACEP) and met Md. Hasan Mahmud, Information Minister of Bangladesh.

4. From the Bangladesh side, important Ministerial level visits included that of Foreign Affairs Minister Dr A K Abdul Momen in February 2019 to attend the Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) meeting, Home Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Khan

for the Home Minister Level Talks in August 2019, Railways Minister Md. Nurul Islam Sujan in August 2019 to discuss various issues related to cooperation in railway sector and Information Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud in January 2020 for promotion of institutional linkages between Prasar Bharati and Bangladesh Betar.

5. In addition to the above high level visits and exchanges between the two countries, there have also been various visits at senior official level for participating in various bilateral mechanisms. The multi-dimensional cooperation between the two countries ranges from traditional sectors of tourism, health and education to frontier technologies of nuclear science, space and information technology. Ten MOUs/agreements for cooperation in various sectors were signed by the two countries on various occasions in 2019.

### **Security and Border Management:**

6. Director General (DG) Level Talks between Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) were held in 2019. In addition, border coordination conferences between regional commanders of BGB and frontier Inspectors General of BSF were also held to discuss management and security of 4096.7 Km of the India-Bangladesh land border.

### **Defense Cooperation:**

7. The year 2019 witnessed significant strides in defense cooperation between India and Bangladesh. High level exchanges at the level of services chief of Indian Navy, Bangladesh Navy and Indian Air Force, conduct of second annual defense dialogue and inaugural tri-services staff talks, service specific talks of Navy and Air Force and the DG level talks between the Coast Guards have contributed to significant improvement in bilateral defense cooperation. The Indian army band also for the first time performed at the national parade of Bangladesh during Victory Day celebration. In the training domain both the countries have continued and enhanced mutual engagements.

8. Muktijoddha related engagements, annual reciprocal visit of Muktijoddhas and war veterans on the occasion of Victory Day were undertaken in 2019 and scholarships were distributed to heirs of Muktijoddhas.

### **Connectivity:**

9. Both the governments are undertaking various measures to restore the pre-1965 rail links and other connectivity links that existed between India and Bangladesh. To enhance people to people contacts, it has been decided to increase the frequency of two passenger trains, i.e., Maitree Express and Bandhan Express from 4 days a

week to 5 days a week and from one day a week to two days a week respectively. During the visit of PM Sheikh Hasina to New Delhi in October 2019, both the governments decided to commence Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka and Dhaka-Siliguri-Darjeeling-Dhaka bus service to enhance people to people contacts between both the countries and the trial run of Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka was also held in December 2019.

10. Two new India-Bangladesh Protocol Routes (Sonamura-Daudkandi on river Gomti and extension of Dhulia to Godagiri up to Aricha on river Padma) have also been agreed upon for inclusion in the second addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT).

### **Economic and Commercial:**

11. Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia. Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has grown steadily over the last decade. India's exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 stood at US\$ 9.21 bn and imports from Bangladesh during the same period were US\$1.04 bn. Meetings of various institutional mechanisms to promote bilateral trade including that of border haats, shipping, LCS/ICP infrastructure and on establishment of Indian Economic Zone etc were held in 2019. In order to promote cooperation on bilateral trade, both the Prime Ministers agreed to create an India-Bangladesh CEO's Forum to provide policy level inputs in various areas of trade and investment and also to facilitate exchanges among the business communities of both the countries.

12. Cooperation in power sector has become one of the hallmarks of India-Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh is currently importing 1160 MW of power from India. The meetings of Joint Working Group (JWG)/Joint Steering Committee (JSC) on power were also held in 2019.

### **Development Partnership:**

13. Bangladesh is the biggest development partner of India today. India has extended 3 Lines of Credits (LOC) to Bangladesh in the last 8 years amounting to US\$ 8 billion for development of infrastructure in various sectors including roads, railways, shipping and ports. In addition to LOCs, the Government of India has also been providing grant assistance to Bangladesh for various infrastructure projects including construction of Akhaura-Agartala rail link, dredging of inland waterways in Bangladesh and construction of India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline.

14. Small Development Projects (SDPs) constitute an active pillar of India's development assistance. The Government of India has funded 55 SDPs including construction of student hostels, academic buildings, cultural centers and orphanages etc in Bangladesh and another 26 SDPs are being implemented.

### **Capacity Building and Human Resource Development:**

15. Human resource development is a key component of India's development cooperation efforts in Bangladesh through its several ongoing training programs and scholarships. The Government of India has been training 1800 Bangladesh Civil Service officials from 2019 at National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG), Mussoorie. Bangladeshi police officials are also being trained at various premier training institutes in India on various modern policing and new investigative techniques of this information age. Similarly, the Government of India has been extending training for 1500 Bangladeshi judicial officials since 2017 at National Judicial Academy, Bhopal and also at various State Judicial Academies in India. Bangladesh is also an important ITEC partner country and annually around 800 participants from Bangladesh avail the ITEC training courses. In addition, 200 scholarships are awarded by ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) every year to students from Bangladesh for pursuing under-graduation, post-graduation and M.Phil/PhD courses in educational institutes of India including the IITs and NIITs.

16. The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) in Dhaka plays an important role in celebration of common cultural links between the two countries. Its training programs including Yoga, Kathak, Manipuri dance, Hindi language, Hindustani classical music and the cultural programs of renowned artists of India and Bangladesh contribute in promotion of people to people contacts.

### **Visas:**

17. In pursuance of the policy of the Government of India to further liberalize Indian visa application process and to strengthen people to people contacts between India and Bangladesh, six new Indian Visa Application Centers (IVACs) were opened in Cumilla, Noakhali, Brahmanbaria, Sathkira, Thakurgaon and Bogura of Bangladesh in 2019 raising the total number of IVACs to 15. In 2019, the number of visas issued to Bangladeshi citizens crossed the mark of 16 lakh. Opening of two new Assistant High Commissions in Khulna and Sylhet in 2019 has also helped in facilitating an efficient and quick visa processing for Bangladeshi nationals.

*31 January 2020*

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