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Recent Issues and Problems in Bangladesh-India Relations: A Bangladeshi Perspective

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Abstract

The relationship between India and Bangladesh has been steadily growing in recent years, particularly after Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took office in January 2009. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised the relationship as a "golden period" in 2019. Indeed, Bangladesh is crucial to India's "Neighborhood First" and "Act East" policies and has played a critical role in sustaining peace and security in the country's Northeast region. Yet, despite their mutual goodwill, there is some pessimism regarding the relationship's future. This article examines the historical evolution of India-Bangladesh relations, the diverse perspectives on the relationship (Economic, Defense, Strategic), Bangladesh's significance to India, and the issues that threaten to cloud India-Bangladesh ties.

Keywords: Bangladesh; India; Economic Relations; Defense Relations; Geo-Strategic; Security; Significance; Diverse Perspectives; Threaten Issues; Relationship

Introduction

It is often experienced that there remain troubled relations between neighboring countries due to conflict and disputes surrounding various issues. But Bangladesh-India bilateral relations are exceptions and regarded as a role model in the world in terms of relations among neighboring countries. Though the relationship has been carried over the years with varying degree of congeniality, no one can deny the significance of this

bondage in the larger South Asian context. These two neighboring states is not only bonded by the similarity of history, socio-cultural heritage and land border but also by India's historic role in the liberation war of 1971 when Bangladesh waged a nine-month long war against Pakistan. So, Bangladesh and India, two neighboring states have become connected as historic allies not only by the centuries of shared history, society, politics, culture, and religion but also by liberation war of 1971 (Singh, 2013). Over the past few years, the upward trajectory of cooperation between the two countries on various aspects has gathered momentum. The year 2021 has marked 50 years of Bangladesh-India relations which is lauded as 'precious achievement' by many. However, there exist issues such as border killing, water sharing of the Transboundary Rivers, illegal migration etc. which cause irritations every now and then. Though agreements on 'zero border killing' between two countries has been reached recently, the lack of realization of this is creating frustration. The issue of water-sharing of Trans boundary Rivers is another irritant to the Bangladesh-India bilateral relations as India has aborted to comply and ensure fair share to Bangladesh due to the continuous dispute between the central government and the provincial government of West Bengal. Another matter of concern for Bangladesh is the 'Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)', enacted in 2019. This Act was criticized worldwide due to its classification of citizens on the basis of religion. With such an act in action, almost two million migrants, majority of who were Muslims, have been precluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam. There is a concern that they may flee illegally to Bangladesh as they are worried about being sent to detention camps otherwise. In addition to these, Latest matter of controversy in Bangladesh-India relations arose due to India's lack of stance for the cause of Bangladesh interests in the Rohingya issue (Yasmin, 2021).

Historical Evolution of Bangladesh-India Relations

The two neighboring countries of South Asia, Bangladesh and India, have been historically enjoying close relations since Independence of Bangladesh in 1971 except few years of anomalies. When the people of East Pakistan fought in the war of independence against the West Pakistani military rule under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the assistance and humanitarian support proffered by India is unparalleled. Due to geographical contiguity, Bangladesh was left with no other choice but to accept favor and support from India. From India's perspective, helping Bangladesh to liberate could be seen as both, an act of good neighborliness and an opportunity to reflect principles of Gandhian and Nehruvian philosophies (Yasmin, 2021). The history of Bangladesh-India relations can be broadly divided into three phases, namely the first phase under first

civilian regime led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib (Period between 1972 and 1975), second phase under military dictators (Period between 1975 and 1990) and third phase (Period from Post 1990 till present). The first civilian government of Bangladesh under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman maintained profound friendship and cooperation with India which was delineated as a 'honeymoon' period. During the period between 1972 and 1975, India agreed to withdraw military troops in response to Sheikh Mujib's request, two neighboring states signed a treaty named 'Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace' in 19 March 1972 and Land Border Agreement (LBA) in 1974 (Chowdhury, 2020). The second phase began with the fall of Mujib regime by a brutal military coup on 15 August 1975 that saw assassination of the Father of the Nation along with his family members. The post Sheikh Mujib era began with the rise of General Ziaur Rahman, a decorated hero of liberation war. His foreign policy emphasized on building relations with China, Western and Islamic countries. Bangladesh-India relations during his regime were marked by mistrust, suspicion and hostility. The successor of General Zia, General Ershad also adopted a similar policy towards maintaining relations with India as his government projected India as an imperialistic and opportunistic regional hegemon (Karim, 2020). The third phase began with the ousting of Military dictator General Ershad and the revival of democracy in December 1990. After the revival of democracy, Begum Khaleda Zia-led BNP, a democratic party, was in power between 1991 and 1996. But the relations between India and Bangladesh did not improve during this period. However, relations improved dramatically when Awami League under Sheikh Hasina returned to power in 1996. The signing of Ganges water sharing Treaty was seen as the reflection of such tremendous improvement of bilateral relations during the period between 1996 and 2001. The relations aggravated to its lowest ebb when BNP came to power and held the state power between 2001 and 2006. With the election of 2008, Awami League under Sheikh Hasina again assumed office since when India-Bangladesh ties gained a new momentum (Quader, 2019). The bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India that marked 50th anniversary recently projects a noticeable pattern of fluctuation as the relations improve when Awami League government assumes office and ties deteriorate when a non-Awami League government holds power (Chowdhury, 2020).

India-Bangladesh Relations' Recent Developments

Bangladesh-India bilateral relations has been shaped not only by century old historical, geographical, cultural, social and economic ties but also by the pivotal role played by India in the birth of Bangladesh. Contemporary issues, problems, cooperation and developments of the

relations between two neighboring countries can be classified into three major aspects, namely Military, Economic and Geostrategic aspects and they are elaborated below:

Defense

Cooperation in the area of defense can be traced back to the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. The Indian military forces trained, collaborated and led Bangladeshi freedom fighters in the Liberation War to give birth to sovereign state of Bangladesh. However, the military and defense cooperation between Bangladesh and India was neglected for a long time. India and Bangladesh have been sharing a warm relationship since Awami League captured the state power in the election of 2008. Since then, both the countries have been cooperating on various economic, social, scientific and technological areas. In 2017, the two countries states signed a number of agreements and Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) in areas of defense cooperation. Among these MoUs agreement on extending a line of credit worth US\$500 million to purchase of defense equipment's worth mentionable. Regular mutual visits by the Presidents, and armed forces leaders have also become routine matter between the two countries. Besides, joint exercises, medical assistance and training programs are held by participation of the defense services of both countries (Bhattacharjee, 2018). In January 2021, a contingent of 122-member from Bangladesh Armed Forces participated in India's Republic Day parade (Basu, 2021). India also showed similar endeavors as military contingents from India joined the parade of the Victory Day ceremony alongside the country's forces on 16 December 2021 (BSS, 2021). However, there is also a matter of apprehension regarding the India–Bangladesh defense partnership due the China factor. China, being the biggest arms provider of Bangladesh and the latest procurement of two submarines by Bangladesh from China has become a matter of concern for India (Bhattacharjee, 2018).

Economic

Economic aspect of Bangladesh-India bilateral relations includes both Industrial and trade relations between the two neighboring countries. Top industrialists from India like Tatas and Adanis have set up their network in Bangladesh as the manufacturing units of the above Indian industrial groups have been set up at Sonargaon, Dhaka. In terms of trade, the bilateral economic relations possess unexplored possibilities with prospect of USD 16.4 billion bilateral trade. Bangladesh is the biggest trading partner of India in South Asia whereas India is the second biggest trading partner of Bangladesh. However, the main problem lies in the massive trade imbalance between two countries. Though the volume of trade reached the landmark of

USD 10 billion in FY 2019-20, trade imbalance was predominant in the trade exchange. The trade ratio was 1:8 where Bangladesh exported USD 1.26 billion and imported USD 8.2 billion (Shazzad, 2021). Such imbalance in bilateral trade has become a matter of Political discontentment in Bangladesh. Besides, such deficit in bilateral trade has been magnified by the Informal and unrecorded trade that occurs through unguarded land border between two countries since the birth of Bangladesh (Dutta, 2010). It is advocated by the experts that a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between these countries can devise a level playing field for Bangladesh and unleash the full potential of economic engagement. It is hoped that both countries will begin negotiations for signing a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with India in 2022 to realize such potential. If agreed successfully, the CEPA, would cover a wide range of issues and address impediments related to trade, investment, government procurement etc. (Mirdha, 2021).

Geostrategic and Security

From geostrategic perspective, Bangladesh's foreign policy gives momentous importance to India as it is surrounded by India from three sides and shares most of its border with India. Similarly, India wants to fulfill its dream of becoming "regional hegemon" where it requires Bangladesh's unwavering support. So, both the neighboring countries are in dire need of each other in their journey. Two neighboring states share a 4,096km border, the longest that is shared by India with any of its neighbors. Since 2008, trajectory of bilateral relations has been experiencing an upward trend. The resolution of maritime boundary dispute in 2014 brought new promise of geostrategic cooperation between two countries as India gave up approximately 19,467 sq. km in the Bay of Bengal without any further challenge. The next year they sorted out their conflict regarding land through the implementation of Land Border Agreement (LBA) in June 2015 (Mahajan, 2021). To enhance connectivity, two countries first agreed to sign a transit agreement in 2010. The two neighboring governments also agreed a protocol that allows India to wield four river ways through Bangladesh for connecting Kolkata and Murshidabad to Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya in 2015. In 2015, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also signed for the use of Chattogram and Mongla ports by India after years of demand and within few years, it turned into an agreement (Byron and Palma, Daily Star 2019). Besides, Bangladesh has become the most important partner in India's strategic calculations as it provides route for connecting North eastern Indian states to its mainland and helps in curbing insurgencies in these states.

India's Interest in Bangladesh

The relations between Bangladesh and India are not only based on neighborhood but also trustworthiness and strategic importance which no party can ignore in this changing geopolitical landscape of South Asia. There exist reasons for such primacy of Bangladesh in India's geopolitical and strategic calculus. Firstly, the unique position of Bangladesh in the eastern part of South Asia provides it the opportunity to play leading role in connecting South Asian states such as Bhutan, India and Nepal with the ASEAN and other countries of East Asia (Chaudhury, 2018). Secondly, Bangladesh can also play a major collaborative role in providing the security of the northeastern states and eastern India. If Bangladesh does not agree to cooperate with India, it is almost difficult for India to curb insurgencies from these parts. In addition, integration of those states with the heartland is difficult to manage if India does not get access to the northeast through Bangladesh. Thirdly, Trade counts for economic growth in a globalizing world. Bangladesh is crucial for India because it is one of India's biggest trading partners. Fourthly, Bangladesh enjoys much greater attention because two neighboring countries share more than 40 rivers. As Bangladesh is the lower riparian state, it does not get the fair share of water from these rivers. However, failure of India to behave sensibly in sharing river-water justly with Bangladesh will be catastrophic not only for Bangladesh but also for Northeast, West Bengal, and further away states further of India. Finally, a stable, tolerant and progressive. Bangladesh is a must for India to curb terrorism, insurgency and other forms of transnational crimes (Bajpai, 2011).

Conflicts between Bangladesh and India, both current and recent Farakkha Matter

Water conflicts for the Farakkha and Teesta barrages are projected to receive the same amount of priority as the trade imbalance. Bangladesh recognized a water conflict along the Farakkha when India began operations in 1975. During 1972, Bangladesh and India formed a joint river commission (JRC) to share Ganga's water for flood management, river system improvement, and cultivation. A preliminary arrangement was agreed for 41 days from 21st April to 31st May to transfer 11,000 to 16,000 cubic water meters. However, India maintained to withdraw water even after 31st May without paying respect to the agreement (Rahman, 2004). Some people also claimed that the Farakkha barrage started working without mutual understanding, and for this reason, it became the core of the disputes between the two countries. With the improvement of the bilateral discussion between the countries, the engagement between India and Bangladesh kept worsening, and the unanticipated murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib generated an explosion in Delhi. India continued to extract water from Ganga

despite the sincere attempt made by the BD. In the meantime, significant political changes have occurred both in India and Bangladesh that created a new shape in the mutual relation between the countries, and after that, the Ganga treaty was agreed on 12th December 1996. As far as the treaty, Bangladesh receives 35,000 cusecs water, and the remaining would go to India if water flow is 75,000 cusecs or greater. In alternate 10-days periods between 11th March and 10th May, every country would get 35,000 cusecs water (HOSSAIN, 2016). India, however, did not comply with the arrangement. It has been seen that water flow in a critical situation benefited India the most. As explained by the requirement by both countries, India had better sort out the issue of sharing an equal quantity of water due to sincerity (Anuttama, 2021).

Teesta Barrage Disputes

India began to extract water by building a barrage across the river at Gozoldoba, and in the dry season, water flow to Bangladesh has reduced to 2020 cusecs from 5,000 cusecs on the 28th February 2005. Bangladesh acquired only 1400 cusecs water (Hossain, 2016). For this reduced water flow, the cultivation program of Bangladesh hurt majorly around the Teesta barrage. Bangladesh has uplifted the matter in several joint river commission meetings, and all the efforts went into the vein. To keep the river in good shape, the specialist suggested keeping 20 to 30 per cent of Teesta water stored in the lean period and giving the remaining part as per the magnitude of the river catchment region. Both countries decided in 2013 to negotiate an arrangement to make BD easier with the Teesta water. Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal, visited Bangladesh and discussed the issue with Bangladeshi PM. However, Mamata rejected the proposal as the central government of India did not discuss the Teesta water matter with Mamata before it was agreed with BD (Saghal, 2011). For this fact, the proposal could not be implemented. PM of both countries sat together again and solved the matter after the government of India was changed in 2015. After settling the issue, Mamata consented to share logical water-sharing agreements with the Indian central government while accompanying Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh. But still is a matter of concern for both countries. Bangladesh was obliged to seek support from China as India has not sorted out the Teesta issue. India has enough time to solve the matter so that Bangladesh does not have to take assistance from China. India's weak relationship with the adjacent countries may have pressed Bangladesh toward Beijing, and many Bangladeshi specialists predicted that. For the integrated relation of Bangladesh-India and long-lasting interest, the Teesta issue needs to be sorted out as soon as possible (Joya, 2020).

Trade Imbalance

Among the existing challenges in India-Bangladesh relations, the trade deficit is the most crucial. It is now a shared realization that the imbalance does not favor the interest of either partner. Since 1972, many agreements have been signed between the two neighboring countries to lessen the inequality in bilateral trade. The first one-year trade agreement between the two countries came on 28 March 1972 in "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace". In March 1973, Bangladesh's export to India was 14 million dollars, whereas India's export to Bangladesh was 18.5 million dollars (Madaan, 1996). In July 1973, the two countries signed another agreement known as the "Balance Trade and Payment Agreement (BTPA)" for regulating bilateral trade relations for three years. However, this agreement failed to bring the desired result in bilateral trade as the imbalance recorded at the end of the year was 8.18 million dollars (Saber, 2008). In the post-Mujib era, after the brutal assassination of Sheikh Mujib in August 1975, the relations between the two countries became troublesome as both the countries started keeping their distance from each other. To add more woes, the Bangladesh government began to lean toward China, the Western world and Muslim countries in terms of military and economic ties. Besides the burgeoning trade deficit, restrictions such as tariff and non-tariff barriers impeded the entrance of Bangladesh goods into the Indian market. For example, tariff duty over consumer goods in Bangladesh was 23%, whereas the for the same products was 30-55% in India (Saber, 2008).

So the Bangladeshi goods had to face massive impediments to compete with the local interests of India, and thus, bilateral trade relations between the two countries suffered most. However, the links started improving after Awami League under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina occupied the office in 1996. But it did not last long as Bangladesh National Party (BNP) came back to power in the 2001 election (Lailufar, 2005). However, the bilateral ties experienced an upward trend when Sheikh Hasina took over as the PM after December 2008 election. However, the trade deficit has remained a burning question for the relationship.

Border Killing

The Bangladesh-India border has been designated a "killing border" and the world's deadliest boundary (Percot, 2020). Since the onset of 2000, human rights violations have been a significant concern on the Bangladesh-India borderlands. India implemented a 'shoot-to-kill' policy towards undocumented Bengali immigrants. According to statistics, between 2000 and 2020, 1230 Bangladeshi people were shot to death near the Bangladesh-India border (Van, 2005). It expresses worries that border guards on the India-Bangladesh border are the most aggressive border force (Odhikar,

2021). After demonstrating the number of killings, has it benefited India's historical bonds with Bangladesh? Clearly, this has harmed the bilateral relationship and increased skepticism of India both among top officials and among the general public. Even though both nations' border officials met and held many talks, the outcome remains pitiful, causing pain to the people of Bangladesh and raising the question of whether India is a modest ally or adversary. Taking it seriously, the Indian government should have created an efficient program to reduce the killing as soon as possible; else, the decade-old ties would be irreversibly damaged.

Rohingya Issue

More than a million Rohingya people have taken shelter in the crowded camps of Bangladesh since 2017 (Indrajit, 2021). However, according to sources, these Rohingya refugees live in degrading conditions of sordid camps and engage in crimes such as human and drug trafficking (Nayarima, 2019). Besides, conflicts among the groups are causing concern as it makes the law-and-order situation of Cox's Bazar region worse-off (Indrajit, 2021). So, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, rightly expressed her concern regarding the security threats of Bangladesh. As a reliable ally of India in South Asia, Bangladesh desired India's support in the issue of the Rohingya refugees' repatriation to Myanmar. However, there is continued suspicion about India's role in Bangladesh, as there is a widespread perception that India's assistance to Bangladesh in dealing with the crisis has been insufficient.

Perceptions of Indian Political Elites Cause Mistrust

Political Elites speeches about Bangladesh sometimes have a negative impression about India and challenges its friendly nature towards Bangladesh. According to a press briefing BJP General Secretary Amit Shah described Bangladesh as a country of 'millions of poverties.' Although knowing the fact that Bangladesh is a faster economic growing country in South Asia. In a recent election campaign in the West Bengal and Assam Border states, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior BJP leaders have often raised the issue of alleged unauthorized immigration from Bangladesh. In 2019 election rally, Amit Shah described illegal immigrants as "Termites" adding that the BJP government would pick up infiltrators one by one and throw them into the "Bay of Bengal." These comments drew sharp criticism from rights groups and triggered anger in Bangladesh. That types of perceptions by the Indian political Elites have resulted in deteriorating Bangladesh-India relations. In July 2020, former senior Indian Diplomat Pinak Rajan Chakravarty wrote an op-ed in the New Indian Express titled, "Bangladesh too on the Chinese radar". Consequently, the

Hindustan Times, in its editorial focus on Bangladesh, “Warred that India was losing a friendly neighbor through wrongheaded policies”. These perceptions may cause mistrust. Indian elites should abstain from doing misconception and refrain from spreading hype rather thus should be optimistic to foster India-Bangladesh ties properly valued Bangladesh and its importance: India should also understand that “Bangladesh should have an independent policy so that it can deal with India, China, America and other countries separately. If India failed to realize that then it may lose Bangladesh’s close ties recent time in 2021. The anger over Prime Minister Modi’s visit is, therefore, “Clear warning to Delhi if the sensibilities of its neighbor are not addressed. India may end up being friends only with the government in Dhaka and not with the people of Bangladesh.

Unkempt Promises:

Unkempt promises are a common phenomenon in Bangladesh-India bilateral ties and it has been occurring as a decade old legacy. Many disputed issues have been unsolved including Teesta River Water sharing still deteriorating the ties. For instance, In September 2020, Bangladesh requested that India reinstate onion exports to the countries which had been suspended unexpectedly by New Delhi. India is Bangladesh’s largest onion supplier, with annual average purchase of more than 35,000 tons. Following the export prohibition, onion prices in Bangladesh increased by more than 50%, causing the government to source supplies from elsewhere and subsidize onions. As a result, while India has historically had a positive relationship with Bangladesh, it has squandered numerous opportunities to strengthen it. At the start of 2021, a dispute occurred over the supply of a vaccine created by Oxford University and Astra Zeneca, which Manufactures the vaccine in collaboration with India’s Pune-based serum institute SII CEO Adar Poonawalla started that India has prohibited serum from selling doses on the private market until the vaccine had been provided to everyone in the country. The announcement set off a frenzy in Bangladesh, which signed a deal with India to acquire 30 million vaccine doses. However, many Bangladeshis interpreted the comments to mean that India abandoned its commitments under the agreement. Although Poorawalla and the Bangladesh Foreign Minister later affirmed that Bangladesh was on track to receive the vaccine, the statement sowed distrust among the Bangladeshi people. Some took to social media to brand India an untrustworthy neighbor. Although several Indian scholars recognized Bangladesh’s significance for India, journalist Shekhar Gupta asserted that, “Bangladesh is India’s most benevolent neighbor”. However, as a result of much of India’s Mainstream media’s failure to recognize and appreciate the significance of its

relationship with Bangladesh, India has adopted policies that are isolating its 'most crucial friend Bangladesh.'

External Influences

Throughout the nation. The prolonged enmity between New Delhi and Dhaka will be to China's greatest advantage, increasing its political and economic sway in Bangladesh. Bangladesh's geographic position has made it advantageous for China as a developing nation looking for foreign investment (Shikha, 2014). Numerous experts from both countries still have doubts about Bangladesh's relationship with India. The relationship between the two countries is severely strained as a result of a multitude of unresolved issues, and the resulting mistrust has created a space for countries like China to intervene in Bangladesh in an effort to win over the people and come to a resolution because Bangladesh is strategically situated for both India and China, its main rival. In an effort to tighten their grip, this has led to a quiet tug-of-war between Beijing and New Delhi over Dhaka. Bangladesh and China have also had a long-standing relationship. Bangladesh's primary trading partner now is China, with whom the country has had ties for centuries. The staggering amount offered to Bangladesh by a foreign country has been calculated at 38 billion US dollars for Chinese investment in Bangladesh (Bhattacharya, 2019). This consists of a variety of infrastructure projects to strengthen economic ties between Bangladesh and China. Currently under development is the \$1.65 billion Payra Coal Power Plant. China's 25% stake in the Dhaka stock exchange is one of many Chinese instruments, many of which are still in the planning stages and are awaiting formal clearance (Bhattacharya, 2018). China has also given Bangladesh significant help in the domain of defence. Bangladesh was South Asia's second-largest importer of Chinese arms after Pakistan. According to a 2020 Stockholm International Peace Study Institute study, Bangladesh is China's second-largest military equipment buyer. One-fifth of China's military shipments are currently transported through Dhaka (Pieter, 2021). Regarding China's investments in Bangladesh's naval defence, India has expressed worry. Especially in light of Bangladesh purchasing a type 035 submarine from China for an astronomically low price. 2019 (The Daily Tribune). According to several South Asian analysts, this military cooperation "would give China a strategic foothold on India's Eastern Land in Bangladesh" (Kondapalli, 2002). India is now more cognizant of China's position in what some regard to as its doorstep as a result of this. Beijing has a lot more money than Delhi to provide to its neighbours. Due to China's significant investments, several nations have changed their loyalty to China (Niaz, 2005). Experts disagree, meanwhile, on whether India's neighbours are a reason for concern. India is not interested in settling the current problems,

which allows China to approach Bangladesh and other South Asian Indian neighbours. Growing connections between China and Bangladesh have frequently angered India. They have little choice but to circumnavigate the geopolitical landscape of South East Asia cautiously, as rising demand for Bangladesh could push it into China's hands. India's "neighbourhood first" policy will unquestionably suffer greatly as a result (Subir, 2017). Let's say India continues to be ignorant of this complex issue. If that occurs, China will replace Pakistan as Bangladesh's closest friend, raising security questions for India and thwarting its long-held ambition to become an Asian Super Power (Sakhujia, 2009). Subir Bhowmik, editor-in-chief of the Eastern Link News Site, believes that Dhaka may have turned to Beijing because of India's tense relations with its neighbours.

Conclusion

Bangladesh, India's most dependable partner in South Asia, is not a mere neighbor. It is one of India's most critical strategic allies, and India cannot afford to ignore it. On the other hand, Bangladesh, which shares most of its border with India, has always prioritized India in its foreign policy. As India embarks on a lengthy journey to achieve its aim of being a "Regional power," Bangladesh has the potential to become South Asia's economic center of gravity due to its strategic location as the Bay of Bengal's gateway, both countries rely on one another. However, the existence of disputed issues and the emergence of new ones continue to be a source of concern for the future of Indo-Bangladesh relations. This contagious issue fosters distrust, erecting barriers to the long-term vision and mutual belief. Both countries must recognize that a lack of faith may allow other countries to interfere, which would be particularly dangerous for India given China's proactive efforts in South Asia to strengthen economic, military, and strategic ties with all countries, including Bangladesh. Bangladesh's geostrategic location is critical for China's access to the Indian Ocean, as Bangladesh is the Indian Ocean's gateway. Bangladesh is a bordering country with India, and it is also the most strategic and convenient way to manage the Indian North East region. Therefore, if disputed issues create mistrust, China's activity with Bangladesh may increase, posing an offensive security threat to India. A recent example is China's proposal to invest \$1 billion in constructing the Testa Dam. Although it is a well-known fact that the Bangladesh-India Teesta River dispute dates back a decade, the Indian government has yet to resolve it, and China has seized the opportunity to expand its cooperation with Bangladesh. Like other regional powers, India must play a pivotal role as a South Asian giant. For example, the European Union is the world's most potent organization today, but it did not emerge overnight. During its formation, large countries such as France, Germany, and the United

Kingdom made numerous sacrifices for small countries to strengthen the organization. Thus, as a regional economic and military power, India should have played a pivotal role in resolving all disputed issues in Bangladesh and South Asia. At this point, the Indian political elite and media should understand the critical nature of Bangladesh and refrain from spreading any news that would be detrimental to the government and people of Bangladesh. Due to ongoing disputes, the countries may face blows and bottlenecks in the coming days. Still, they should not allow antagonism to fester and miscommunication and mistrust to plague their ties. Reliability does not require a long-term relationship; instead, it requires keeping promises, providing support during difficult times, expressing solidarity with a common cause, and working together to address immigrant challenges. The pre-captive policy of avoiding potential pitfalls will ultimately determine the future direction of Bangladesh-India relations over the next 50 years.

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