

## SHEIKH HASINA'S INDIA SOJOURN: TAKING STOCK OF INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

SMRUTI S PATTNAIK

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India Bangladesh relations have emerged as a role model of the bilateral relationship in the context of India's relations with its neighbours. There exist differences between the two on many issues of mutual concern, which is natural between any neighbouring countries, yet, both have taken a conscious decision to move forward on issues that would turn around the economies of the two countries. Not surprisingly, infrastructure, trade and people-to-people contact have received priority. The two countries are working on resolving the long-standing Teesta river water sharing. They have identified seven rivers for water sharing from among the 54 common rivers they share. Cooperation on defence and security, though they are at a nascent stage, the two countries in the past have introduced staff-to-staff dialogue, joint exercises, and cooperation in managing the border in what can be defined as moving towards an enduring relationship taking all the facets of the relationship.



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### INTRODUCTION

Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, visited India after three years amidst a sliding economy and energy crisis contributed by the Russia-Ukraine war. This visit is highly significant, not just in terms of optics but also in the agenda it brought to the table. The two Prime Ministers at Hyderabad house had a summit-level meeting addressing a range of bilateral issues that would add synergy to the bilateral ties. They also discussed other regional and global issues of mutual concern, including Rohingya and water issues. Over more than a decade, the relationship has made significant strides, notwithstanding the nagging problem of water sharing and issues of non-tariff barriers. Yet the two countries have decided to expedite matters that would bind them in a mutually beneficial relations. It is important that as close neighbours, such visits by Prime Ministers only underline the importance that the two countries accord to each other. This is also demonstrated by several other institutional mechanisms that are put in place by the two countries to oversee not just the progress on the agreed areas of cooperation but iron out differences, if any, through such meetings.

### **Enhancing Connectivity: Infrastructure and People-to-People Contact**

Connectivity remains a crucial issue in India-Bangladesh relations. It must be underlined that before the partition of India, the entire region functioned as a single economic unit connected with railways, waterways and the nearest port. After partition, the North East was cut off from the nearest rail, road and port link that constituted its economic lifeline. It became more inward-looking and depended on Calcutta port. Reaching the port often took a circuitous path covering 1600 kilometers by road. In 1965, the connectivity through waterways and railways came to a grinding halt after the India-Pakistan war. After the creation of Bangladesh, the two countries agreed to re-establish connectivity links, but restoration work that was required to put the connectivity in place could not progress with the change of the government in Dhaka after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib. The two countries had limited trade using the waterways by frequently renewing the protocol routes. There has been a significant movement on connectivity after Sheikh Hasina assumed power in 2009. Not just Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina flagged that she wanted to make Bangladesh a hub of connectivity, equalising "Connectivity is productivity", but she realised Bangladesh's path to prosperity is through connectivity, developing infrastructure and attracting investment. Not surprising, Bangladesh not only has the highest GDP in the region, but it will graduate from being the least developed country to a developing country in 2026. The two Prime Ministers inaugurated the Rupsha Rail Bridge, connecting Khulna with Mongla port – two major hubs for transit trade. During this visit, they also awarded a consultancy contract for a feasibility study with detailed engineering design for the proposed Khulna-Darshana and Parbatipur-Kaunia dual gauge rail track project. This will improve the capacity of the existing line and improve the movement of goods between the two countries

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The Khulna-Darshana rail project enhances connectivity on the Khulna-Dhaka, Khulna-Chilahati, and Khulna-Rajshahi routes, as well as between the Mongla Port and Darsana-Gede. Built with an investment of a \$312m line of Credit, this line will help in the transportation of fuel to the proposed fuel-based power plants in Harian, Bheramara, Santahar, Bangabandhu Bridge West Station, Amanura, Faridpur, Thakurgaon, and Rangpur.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Parbatipur Kaunia broad gauge line has seven railway stations and 47 bridges built at the cost of \$120m. This will improve the capacity of Bangladesh railways in the Lalmonirhat-Kaunia-Rangpur-Parbatipur-Kanchan-Panchagarh section, Kanchan-Birol border section, and Shantahar-Bogura-Kaunia-Rangpur-Parbatipur-Kanchan-Panchagarh corridor.<sup>2</sup> In the recent past, Bangladesh has allowed India to use the road network of Tamabil-Sylhet-Fenchuganj-Rajnagar-Moulvibazar-Shameshernagar-Chatlapur using border points of Dawki – Tamabil and Chatlapur – Kailasshar to transport liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and petroleum oil (POL) in a sealed container between the two north-eastern states of Assam and Tripura for four months, ending in November.<sup>3</sup> This is for the second time it has extended this facility to India. The MoU for transporting petroleum products stipulates certain administrative fees, local tolls, and other expenses and also includes a charge of Tk 1.85 per ton per km for road usage. The IOCL will bear this cost.<sup>4</sup> This helps the IOCL to reach Tripura during the flooding season which sees landslides due to heavy rains. After the Mongla and Chittagong ports were opened for bilateral and subregional trade, India and Bangladesh signed SOPs in 2019 that lays down details of the movements of goods to and from India using these two ports.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the opening of Maitri Setu over the Feni river in 2021 provides the fastest land route to connect

<sup>1</sup> “Bangladesh, India sign consultancy contracts for two railway projects”, *United News of Bangladesh*, August 25, 2022, <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/asia/bangladesh/bangladesh-india-sign-consultancy-contracts-for-two-railway-projects/ar-AA116ybl>

<sup>2</sup> “India and Bangladesh partner on two rail projects”, *Railway Technology*, August 26, 2022, <https://www.railway-technology.com/news/india-bangladesh-two-rail-projects/>

<sup>3</sup> Munima Sultan, “India to use BD roads for nearly four months”, *Financial Express*, August 04, 2022, <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/india-to-use-bd-roads-for-nearly-four-months-1659586169>

<sup>4</sup> The route used will be Dawki (Meghalaya) – Tamabil (Bangladesh) – Sylhet – Fenchuganj (using Sylhet bypass) – Rajnagar – Moulvibazar /Brahmanbazar- Shameshernagar – Chatlapur (Bangladesh) – Kailasshar (Tripura). See, MoU signed for carrying Indian POL/LPG through Bangladesh”, *Prothom Alo* (English), August 03, 2022, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/e9tg0qgsjk>.

<sup>5</sup> “Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of the Agreement on the Use of Chottogram and Mongla Ports for Movement of Goods to and from India between the Government of People’s Republic of Bangladesh and the Government of the Republic of India”, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, India, October 05, 2019, <https://shipmin.gov.in/sites/default/files/sopn.pdf>

the landlocked Northeast region via Sabroom to the Chittagong port. This will also help the North East to access Chittagong port for its export, saving time and cost.

For more than a decade, the government under Shiekh Hasina has made an effort to restore the connectivity that existed between the two countries before 1965. With all these connectivities (rail, road and waterways) put in place, the possibility of seeing an economically resurgent North East is not far. The connection through Bangladesh has always been the economic lifeline of the Northeast region. It is not surprising that Bangladesh's Prime Minister invited the Chief Ministers of the North Eastern states when the Minister in charge of Development of Northeast Region (DoNER) met her during this visit. Apart from the transport connectivity to facilitate the movement of goods, several passenger trains and buses ply between the two countries – a move to facilitate the movement of people. Three passenger trains – Maitree, Bandhan and Mitali Express and five bus services run on the following routes. Dhaka-Kolkata-Dhaka, Dhaka-Agartala-Dhaka, Dhaka-Sylhet-Shillong-Guwahati-Dhaka, Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata-Agartala, and Dhaka-Khulna-Kolkata-Dhaka. The two Prime Ministers also emphasised people-to-people connectivity in their press briefing on September 6. India also issues the largest number of visas to Bangladesh. It is important to note that border infrastructure needs further improvement. Many people prefer to travel by road and rail as it remains the cheapest mode of travel compared to air. Connectivity needs to be matched with seamless movement of people that entails less paperwork and shorter lines at the immigration counter so that harassment by touts would reduce. A medical visa is generally granted for one year with multiple entries. Attendants up to three person are also granted visas. The medical sector in India sees a boom as many people from Bangladesh come to India for high-quality medical treatment since it is cheaper compared to many other countries in Asia.

### **Enhancing Trade and Interlocking Interest**

Trade remains important as it reflects a dependent market structure based on demand and supply. The border infrastructure is not geared toward handling the increased volume of trade. According to a study India's Petrapole border can handle up to 750 trucks daily. On the other side, Bangladesh's Benapole border point can only clear up to 370 of them.<sup>6</sup> Such disparity in the handling capacity also results in congestion at the border. Another issue is dealing with the parking mafia controlling the entry and exit of trucks. Often business people complain about this and say their trucks are unnecessarily detained to earn hefty overnight parking fees in India operated by the private parking mafia.<sup>7</sup> According to a recent report in

<sup>6</sup> Mandakini Kaul, "A visit to India's busiest integrated border crossing shows need for regional cooperation and connectivity", *World Bank*, February 10, 2022, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/visit-indias-busiest-integrated-border-crossing-shows-need-regional>

<sup>7</sup> Interview conducted in the Rajshahi Land Customs station with traders in Bangladesh in 2018. However situation has not improved. Also see, Namrata Acharya & Ishita Ayan Dutt, "Petrapole parking woes choke border trade with Bangladesh", *The Business Standard*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.business->

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the Hindu Business line, 'While private warehouses and parking bays thrive on the Indian side, truckers allege that they are forced to pay ₹3,000-4,000 goonda tax in Bangladesh on every trip.'<sup>8</sup> According to this report, since Bangladesh has prioritised clearance of export cargo to India, preference is given to 40-plus sealed containerised export cargo containing cotton fabric. It prioritises the import of truck chassis, approximately 100 a day. This leaves a small window for businessmen engaged in import and export, according to Pratim Ranjan Basu, who has written this report.<sup>9</sup> Bangladesh has yet to have a modern cargo handling facility that delays the unloading of trucks from India by a week. India imposes a fine of Rs 5000 on trucks as a penalty for congestion if the truck occupies a port parking space for more than 24 hours. The introduction of 24/7 clearance has not helped the matter as bilateral trade has increased touching US\$ 19 billion. Considering the congestion, India's proposal to fund a second freight gate at Petrapole-Benapole ICP has found a place in the joint statement.<sup>10</sup> A report on the implementation of trade facilitation proposes establishing rail-connected container yards inside ICP Petrapole.<sup>11</sup>

In Bangladesh, for instance, seamless connectivity with India can raise national income by as much as 17 per cent, while India would gain by 8 per cent.

Several studies in the recent past have indicated how the two countries would benefit from trade. In Bangladesh, for instance, seamless connectivity with India can raise national income by as much as 17 per cent, while India would gain by 8 per cent. The major challenge is not only converting meter gauge to broad gauge but agreeing on Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), simplifying rules to encourage export and making the trade hassle-free. In the past few years,

both countries have been working on harmonising standards on specified products agreed upon by both. To implement this, the two countries signed an agreement in 2015<sup>12</sup>. It is important that the timeframe required to intimate laboratory test results within the mandated seven days needs to be reduced further as a paperless digitised process and

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[standard.com/article/economy-policy/petrapole-parking-woes-choke-border-trade-with-bangladesh-118021900034\\_1.html](https://www.standard.com/article/economy-policy/petrapole-parking-woes-choke-border-trade-with-bangladesh-118021900034_1.html)

<sup>8</sup> Pratim Ranjan Basu, "24X7 Customs clearing fails to boost trade at Petrapole", December 06, 2021, *Business Line*, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/24x7-customs-clearing-fails-to-boost-trade-at-petrapole/article23638306.ece>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> India Bangladesh Joint Statement during State Visit of Prime Minister of Bangladesh to India", 07 September 2022, [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/india-bangladesh-joint-statement-during-the-state-visit-of-prime-minister-of-bangladesh-to-india/](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/india-bangladesh-joint-statement-during-the-state-visit-of-prime-minister-of-bangladesh-to-india/)

<sup>11</sup>Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs, <https://www.cbic.gov.in/resources/htdocs-cbec/implmntin-trade-facilitation/NTFAP2020-23jk.pdf>, p.25 World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement in April 2016, which

subsequently came into force on 22nd February 2017.

<sup>12</sup>"Agreement Between Bureau Of Indian Standards And Bangladesh Standards And Testing Institution on Cooperation in the Field of Standardization and Conformity Assessment", 2015, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/BG15B2967.pdf>

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computerised inputs help to exchange information faster. Even though these appear as a tall order, it is a pre-requisite. For example, loading and unloading goods at the border create further hassle since vehicles carrying goods are not allowed to enter each other's territory. Transit enabling vehicles to move in each other's territory is yet to be implemented. According to reports, more than 22 documents and 55 signatures are required for trade between Bangladesh and India. Setting up testing laboratories near the border will lessen the difficulties of traders who often complain about non-tariff barriers. Due to these non-tariff barriers, bilateral trade is yet to achieve its potential. India grants five years visas to encourage businessmen and investors who need to travel frequently. It was only in 2007 that India lifted a ban imposed on Bangladeshi investors under Foreign Exchange and Management Act (FEMA). As of 2021, 350 Indian companies are registered in Bangladesh with 3.5 billion USD in FDI.<sup>13</sup>

As Bangladesh graduates from a least developing country to a developing country, ostensibly, many of the trade benefits it enjoys in terms of preferential access to the market will go. Prime Minister Modi and Hasina expressed their desire to strengthen trade relations that address these concerns. Both countries will discuss the Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (CEPA) to take the trade relation forward. It is expected that CEPA will enhance bilateral trade and open up the service sector. With the connectivity network, CEPA is likely to be a game changer. Besides, congestion in the land port and the time taken for customs clearance discourage trade. There is an urgent need for the two countries to look into this aspect while moving forward to sign CEPA. According to a study contribution of the service sector to Bangladesh's GDP is growing. In FY 2015-16, Bangladesh received about US\$3.14 billion from exporting services.<sup>14</sup> This potential needs to be harnessed further through CEPA.

India and Bangladesh have restored freight trains via the Haldibari–Chilahati rail route after 56 years which not only remains a landmark development but also attests to the state of apathy that historically plagued connectivity efforts.<sup>15</sup> Yet it needs to be noted bilateral lethargy is now a thing of the past. Bangladesh has requested India to allow this route for Bangladesh's trade with Bhutan. Since trade through this route remains restricted and conducted through a positive list, India has asked Bangladesh to remove those restrictions as it will serve the larger trade interest of the two countries. India also requested Bangladesh to have 'one major land port without port restrictions or negative list restrictions, on the border

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<sup>13</sup> Deepanjan Roy Choudhury, "India should look at Bangladesh as economic opportunity: Envoy", *Economic Times*, September 13, 2021, [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-should-look-at-bangladesh-as-economic-opportunity-envoy/articleshow/86156819.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-should-look-at-bangladesh-as-economic-opportunity-envoy/articleshow/86156819.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

<sup>14</sup> Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute, "Export Potentials of Trade in Services in Bangladesh: Identifying the Opportunities and Challenges", July 2018, <https://bfti.org.bd/pdf/Service%20Study1a.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> The Haldibari-Chilahati link is the fifth one connecting India with Bangladesh. The other operational linkages are the two kilometre long Petrapole (India) - Benapole (Bangladesh), Gede (India) - Darshana (Bangladesh), Singhabad (India) Rohanpur (Bangladesh), Radhikapur (India) - Birol (Bangladesh).

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with the North Eastern States of India, for easier market access, starting with ICP Agartala-Akhaura'.<sup>16</sup> It must be noted that 99% of the cargo moved by rail is Bangladesh's imports from India.<sup>17</sup> Waterways remain the cheapest route of transportation.<sup>18</sup> India is developing 900-kilometer waterways to transport freight from North East using the Ganges through Sundarban taking the Padma route in Bangladesh, and merging into the Brahmaputra route to reach Assam. It also needs to be noted that Bangladesh has an extended transit facility to India at the rate of 1.92 Taka (BDT) per ton. This time India announced a free transit facility for Bangladesh's export to a third country using specified Land Customs Station/Airports and Seaports. Bangladesh was enjoying such a facility for its export to Nepal and Bhutan. However, the two countries would also require simplifying the paperwork to operationalise multimodal connectivity and make the bilateral transaction paperless.

### Capacity Building

India is engaged in capacity-building exercises in the neighbourhood through training and exchange programs. Its ITEC program is geared towards this. In 2019 during the Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) meeting that the two Foreign Ministers jointly hold, an MoU was signed between the National Centre for Good Governance Mussoorie and the Ministry of Public Administration to train 1800 civil servants from Bangladesh over six years. Already the two countries are engaged in capacity-building exercises between the two armed forces through joint training and military exercises. This time, during Prime Minister Hasina's visit, it was agreed that Bangladesh railway personnel would train in India and also India would help in capacity building of Bangladesh judicial officers through training in India.

### Water sharing, Navigation and Basin Management

Water sharing has remained a volatile factor in bilateral relations. India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers. Prime Minister Hasina, in her briefing to the press after the end of the summit meeting, emphasised the need to agree on the long-pending Teesta water sharing. Due to the West Bengal Chief Minister's reluctance, this issue has been pending for the past

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twelve years. North Bengal in India and the northern part of Bangladesh depend on Teesta water for irrigation. Since the two countries almost reached an agreement in 2011 which could not be signed, each time the Prime Ministers visit each other's country, the focus is on

<sup>16</sup> See, Point Number 22 in the Joint Statement. "India Bangladesh Joint Statement during State Visit of Prime Minister of Bangladesh to India", September 07, 2022, [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/india-bangladesh-joint-statement-during-the-state-visit-of-prime-minister-of-bangladesh-to-india/](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/india-bangladesh-joint-statement-during-the-state-visit-of-prime-minister-of-bangladesh-to-india/)

<sup>17</sup> "Delegation of Journalists from Bangladesh Calls on Railway Minister", *Press information Bureau*, September 18, 2013, <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/erecontent.aspx?reid=99444>

<sup>18</sup> MEA India, "Protocol on Inland Waterways for trade and Transit, 2015", <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/BG15B2421.pdf>

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Teesta water sharing which has now become a barometer to measure the success of any bilateral visits. However, the two countries decided not to keep their cooperation on common rivers contingent on the Teesta agreement. The signing of an agreement on Kushiyara reflects the resolve to move ahead.

*The present bilateral status is precisely in tandem with the vision of 'Bangabandhu' Mujibur Rehman held 50 years back when he spoke of enduring and eternal ties between the two countries (otut ar okhoy) in his first visit to Calcutta in February 1972 after taking oath as the Prime Minister of newly liberated Bangladesh.*

Seven rivers, Teesta, Muhuri, Dharla, Khowai, Monu, Dudhkumar, and Gumti, have been identified earlier for developing the framework of water sharing agreements on priority. In the recent Joint River Commission (JRC) meeting, the two countries agreed to widen this area of ongoing cooperation by including eight more rivers for data exchange. In 2019, Prime Minister Hasina agreed to provide 1.82 cusecs of water of Feni to Sabroom in Tripura, highlighting the state's role during the liberation war. The two countries in the 38<sup>th</sup> JRC meeting held in August this year have now finalised the design and location of the water intake point. Unfortunately, the JRC met after a very long time, and the last meeting was held way back in 2010. Regular meetings must be held to resolve water sharing and basin management issues. Prime Minister

Hasina emphasised the need for cooperation on 54 common rivers in her briefing to the press.

In the 2011 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development, India and Bangladesh agreed that "both Parties will explore the possibilities of common basin management of common rivers for mutual benefit. They will cooperate and provide necessary assistance to each other to enhance navigability and accessibility of river routes and ports."<sup>19</sup> Some steps have been taken in this regard. For example, navigability on eight river routes has been enhanced. Navigability in the Sirajganj-Daikhowa and Ashuganj-Zakiganj routes is maintained through contribution by India and Bangladesh by sharing a cost of 80:20, respectively. Due to enhanced navigability, an estimated 1.5 million metric tons of traffic is transported via the Protocol routes per annum. About 1.495 million metric tons are inter-country trade cargo and approximately 0.005 million transit cargo.

The two countries have agreed to take a holistic view of the joint rivers through the basin management principle, which will expand the ambit of water sharing to include

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<sup>19</sup> MEA, India, "Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development between India and Bangladesh" September 06, 2011, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5218/Framework+Agreement+on+Cooperation+for+Development+between+India+and+Bangladesh>

sedimentation, erosion of river bank, flora, and fauna and address the fragile ecology of the river system. In 2026, the Ganges water treaty will expire, and it would require the two governments to negotiate a new treaty or stick to the present Treaty, which was agreed upon in 1996. Negotiating a new treaty would be difficult as there is a possibility of hardening stances on both sides. Water needs have increased, and available water is insufficient due to upstream utilisation, using hand pumps, and climatic condition impacting the flow. Indian states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have often complained that their views were not considered while concluding the 1996 Ganges water sharing treaty. They may pressurise the Central government to get more share if the two countries are to negotiate a new treaty. India has extended the period of flood data transmission up to October 31, 2022.<sup>20</sup> The bilateral technical Committee, which is formed, will have a standard operating procedure for transmitting flood data to Bangladesh. A technical body was formed in 2019 to work out means to optimise the utilisation of Ganges water. Many experts have been arguing to maintain what they call 'environmental flow' in the river. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Technical Committees have not made much progress.

Prime Minister Modi emphasised cooperation on Environment and preserving the common heritage of Sundarban. It is recognised that the Sundarban region forms an indivisible ecosystem. The two countries recognise the bio-diversity, flora and fauna and their importance to "acts as a vital protective barrier protecting the mainland from flooding, tidal waves and cyclones".<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, since 2011 only two meetings of the Joint Working Group have taken place. Though the MoU envisages the officials of the two countries to develop a standard template to "understand and share ideas and problems of management, biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and promotion of sustainable socio-economic development, and ecotourism", it appears that there is a lack of thrust on cooperation on Sundarban. Hope with the emphasis on Sundarban in Prime Minister Modi's speech, cooperation will move forward.

As the people-to-people contact is front-tracked, it is important to note that very often, the firing at the border to stop smuggling and breaching of the fence by miscreants from both sides takes away the goodwill that the two countries have tirelessly generated. This requires a sincere effort by both sides to see how such incidences can be avoided. While the countries have joint patrolling that is put in place, such incidents indicate that such mechanism needs a relook. There are also incidents of attacks on the border security force of India as zero firing has emboldened the criminal network that operates in the border region. The smugglers often

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<sup>20</sup> "Bangladesh Asks For More Flood Data From India On Ganga, Brahmaputra, Barak", *Economic Times*, August 27, 2022, <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/bangladesh-asks-for-more-flood-data-from-india-on-ganga-brahmaputra-barak-articleshow.html>

<sup>21</sup> MEA India, "MOU between India and Bangladesh on Conservation of the Sundarban" September 06, 2011, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5218/Framework+Agreement+on+Cooperation+for+Development+between+India+and+Bangladesh>

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attack the BSF jawans with sharp weapons and pose a real challenge to border management. The frequency of patrol needs to be increased and there is a need to convince Bangladesh to impose night curfew on the Bangladesh side of the border. The issue of smuggling needs to be addressed through local intelligence networks on both sides. In Bangladesh, though there is a view that no killing should occur, those articulating such a view have never come up with a practical solution to see how smuggling networks can be busted to address the crime committed by breaching the border.

### CONCLUSION

The two countries celebrated 50 years of diplomatic ties in 2021. India and Bangladesh have made efforts to unleash the economic potential of cooperation through trade and connectivity networks, including coastal connectivity. Such connectivity networks at multiple levels will only result in the interlocking of interest and create a healthy interdependency. This will help the two countries to move beyond the bilateral to a subregional framework which is still a work in progress. While the two countries have divergent security perspectives, there is a meeting of mind in addressing non-traditional security threats arising from climatic changes, natural disasters and the issue of addressing the cross-border terror network. Non-traditional security issues concern common people. Prioritising that would make a win-win situation for both. Prime Minister Hasina remembered her days in Delhi after her illustrious father, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's assassination in Dhaka in 1975. The two Prime Ministers emphasised common history and culture. They also emphasised that their bilateral relation is marked by mutual dependency, respect, enduring friendship, and seamless cooperation, hence a role model for the South Asian region.

Undoubtedly, the present bilateral status is precisely in tandem with the vision of 'Bangabandhu' Mujibur Rehman held 50 years back when he spoke of enduring and eternal ties between the two countries (*otut ar okhoy*) in his first visit to Calcutta in February 1972 after taking oath as the Prime Minister of newly liberated Bangladesh.



**SMRUTI S PATTANAİK**

Dr [SMRUTI S PATTANAİK](#) (PhD) is Research Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.

*Views are author's own.*

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