

FOUR DECADES OF INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Historical Imperatives and Future Direction

Editor

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Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi



Four Decades of India-Bangladesh Relations :
Historical Imperatives and Future Direction

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The opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors
and do not necessarily reflect the views of the two institutes and the
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Content

<i>Preface</i>	7
<i>List of Contributors</i>	13
1. Consonance and Dissonance: Issues and Trends in India-Bangladesh Relations <i>Smruti S Pattanaik</i>	19
2. Trends in Indian Foreign Policy <i>Arvind Gupta</i>	41
3. South Asia and the International Order <i>Segufta Hossain</i>	55
4. Regional Security Environment in South Asia: Overcoming the Constraints <i>Ashok K Behuria</i>	75
5. India-Bangladesh Cross-border Connectivity <i>Sreeradha Datta</i>	87
6. Bangladesh-India Connectivity: A Focus on Transit <i>Ishtiaque Selim</i>	99
7. India-Bangladesh Trade: Problems and Prospects <i>Anand Kumar</i>	113
8. Bangladesh-India Trade and Investment: Bangladesh Perspectives <i>Mahfuz Kabir</i>	123
9. Cooperation on the Water Issue: Bangladesh Perspectives <i>Segufta Hossain</i>	145

10. Water Problems in Bangladesh: Internal and External Dimensions <i>Medha Bisht</i>	163
11. Bangladesh-India Cooperation on Energy Issues: Bangladesh Perspectives <i>Mahfuz Kabir</i>	181
12. Transcending India-Bangladesh Relations: Framing Mutual Security Parameters <i>Smruti S Pattanaik</i>	201
13. Security Dynamics and Bangladesh-India Relations: Bangladesh Perspectives <i>Shaheen Afroze</i>	217
<i>Annexures</i>	225
● India Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement, 1974	
● Terms of Lease in perpetuity of Tin Bigha - Area, October 7, 1982	
● Letter of Foreign Secretary of India Implementing Tin Bigha Lease, 26 March, 1992	
● Ganges Water Treaty, 1996	
● India and Bangladesh Joint communiqué, January 2010	
● Protocol on Demarcation of Land Boundary, 2011	
● Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development	
● Cooperation on Renewable Energy 2011	
● Joint Statement on the Occasion of the visit of the PM of India to Bangladesh, 2011	
<i>Index</i>	277

Preface

The current volume is the result of a dialogue between the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi and the Bangladesh Institute for International and Strategic Studies (BIISS). For the first time, the scholars of the two premier think tanks—IDSA and BIISS have come together to discuss important aspects of India-Bangladesh relations. The volume provides both Indian and Bangladeshi perspectives and is a valuable addition to the existing literature on the subject which would be relevant to the policy makers of the two countries. The contributors have examined the issues keeping the future of bilateral relations in mind. Thus, the focus is on the future of India-Bangladesh relations. In the recent past, the two countries have worked closely to improve their relations and forged close inter-connectivity, keeping the regional perspectives in mind. The dialogue took place at IDSA in May 2011.

The book comprises thirteen chapters discussing the entire gamut of bilateral relations and the way forward. The first chapter titled “Consonance and Dissonance: Issues and Trends in Indo-Bangladesh Relations” provides a historical background to the relations between the two countries and the issues that have bedeviled the bilateral relations. This chapter discusses the synergy between the two countries during the liberation war, relations between them during different regimes in power and a detailed survey on a host of issues that have emerged as a challenge.

The chapter by Arvind Gupta titled “Trends in Indian Foreign Policy” discusses global and regional developments and factors affecting India’s foreign policy. It examines the contours of India’s neighbourhood policy and the challenges it confronts, and examines the trends in India’s foreign policy. It briefly contextualizes India-Bangladesh relations of the wider neighbourhood and explores areas where the two countries can cooperate.

“South Asia and the International Order” by Segufta Hossain, examines in detail major power interests in the region during the cold war period and the developments in the post- cold war era. Post-9/11 developments again attracted the attention of the international community as the global war on terror gained momentum. This chapter places Bangladesh in the regional context and discusses the potential that the country has and the challenges it is facing. The chapter provides recommendations to overcome these challenges.

Ashok Behuria’s chapter on “South Asia: Regional Security Challenges”, deals with the challenges that the countries of the region are facing in terms of social, economic and security challenges and the continuation of political instability in some of the infant democracies in the neighbourhood, that have posed serious a problem to stability. The author argues that security dilemmas and differences in the perception of the regimes have prevented the building of a regional security architecture, and suggests that a multi-track dialogue at various levels is essential to move away from the current impasse which breeds distrust.

Sreeradha Datta’s chapter on “India-Bangladesh Cross-Border Connectivity” discusses India’s efforts to develop a rail and road network that would facilitate trade and transit that Bangladesh is trying to establish with the countries of the region. It provides details of cross-border connectivity and new road and rail links that are being established as part of improving trans-boundary connections. The chapter details prospects of border trade and future connectivity in terms of connecting the energy grid to deal with the shortage of power.

The chapter “Bangladesh-India Connectivity: A Focus on Transit” by Ishtiaque Selim, deals in detail with the longstanding issue of transit, various routes that exist which can be used for the proposed transit route, and examines various schools of thought that exist in Bangladesh regarding provision of transit to India. It also deals with studies that have been undertaken to look at the transit issue and various infrastructure challenges that would emerge as a hindrance to the process. This chapter argues that transit would generate revenue for Bangladesh and create opportunities for employment.

Anand Kumar in his chapter “Indo-Bangladesh Trade: Problems

and prospects”, provides an Indian perspective on the issue of trade. The author delineates various hurdles to India-Bangladesh trade which includes various tariff regimes, illegal trade, smuggling, trade in service and problems of the Non-Tariff Barrier (NTB). The chapter examines whether the Free Trade Agreement can be a way out. The chapter examines the recent developments in bilateral trading relations and suggests measures on how to improve trade. The author argues that private players need to be encouraged to play a larger role in terms of investment.

Mahfuz Kabir’s chapter on “Bangladesh-India Trade and Investment: Bangladeshi Perspectives”, analyses in detail the volume and composition of bilateral trade, issues like trade deficit, establishing bilateral and regional free trade area, tariff and non tariff barriers, and suggests trade facilitation measures. The author suggests some measures on improving trade between Bangladesh and India from Bangladesh’s perspective.

In her second chapter titled “Cooperation on Water Issue: Bangladesh Perspective”, Segufta Hossain examines water as a security concern for Bangladesh in terms of water scarcity. She examines the low riparian anxieties by looking at the issue of Farakka and the proposed river linking project in India and also the controversy surrounding the Tipaimukh Dam. The chapter analyses in detail the challenges to cooperation vis-à-vis water and the constraints in the way of optimizing any such cooperation. The chapter has a section on recommendations on how to overcome the challenges to cooperation between the two countries.

Medha Bisht in the chapter on “Water problems in Bangladesh: External and Internal Dimensions”, deals with three aspects of water security – water reliability, water quality and water quantity. These three issues are discussed taking into account the internal and external dimensions of the water problem that Bangladesh is facing. It also deals with broader problems like river pollution which affect the quality and wastage of the water which could be mitigated by water harvesting and using it judiciously. The chapter also deals in detail with the India-Bangladesh water engagement and related bilateral problems.

The chapter on “Bangladesh-India Cooperation on Energy Issues: Bangladesh Perspectives” by Mahfuz Kabir analyses the energy

requirement of the growing economies of the two countries and the energy security problems they face in terms of the rising price of crude oil, developing alternative sources to meet their energy need and diversification of their energy market. The author argues that the two countries can jointly explore energy sources and cooperate by institutionalizing joint monitoring of pilferage, harmonize oil prices to curb cross-border informal trade, and share information and experience in renewable energy, nuclear energy and energy conservation.

The chapter on “Transcending India-Bangladesh Relations: Framing Mutual Security Parameters” deals with the factors that make cooperation on security issues imperative rather than it being a choice, given a host of non-traditional challenges that would require a cooperative effort. The problems of border management, issues of smuggling, illegal migration and the need to chart out a cooperative security framework are dealt with in detail. The chapter also analyses bilateral and multilateral cooperative frameworks that exist for such cooperation on security. The author argues that cooperation on security assumes greater importance as it is security issues that generate mistrust and suspicions that percolate to other areas of bilateral ties.

Shaheen Afroze’s chapter on “Security Dynamics and Bangladesh-India Relations: Bangladeshi Perspectives”, deals with various challenges the countries are facing. The chapter details how the security concerns of India are impacting on Bangladesh-India relations. It analyses the border-related security challenges which includes killings on the border, illegal migration, problems of enclaves and the delay in implementing the 1974 boundary agreement, and suggests measures on how to meet some of these challenges. The author argues that given the sensitive nature of the issues that confront the two countries, both the governments should be responsive to the mood and sentiment of the people while resolving the problems.

The book also comprises some important documents including latest MoUs and agreements related to India-Bangladesh relations as annexures which would be useful to those researching on India-Bangladesh relations.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank all the contributors of this volume for adhering to the deadlines and submitting their chapters, bearing with various editorial queries, being open to various editorial

suggestions and comments and resubmitting their drafts on time. I would like to sincerely thank Director General IDSA Dr Arvind Gupta, for his unstinted support now and earlier as the head of the South Asia Centre. Without his emphasis to publish the book in time, this effort would have got delayed.

I take this opportunity also to remember the late AKM Abdus Sabur, for his selfless support when both of us were making efforts from 2007 to start the bilateral dialogue between IDSA and BISS which could not happen for one reason or the other. It was only in 2009 when he visited IDSA to attend a conference, that we both finalized the draft of the MoU which was signed in 2010. A special mention needs to be made for Ambassador Virendra Gupta, former deputy director who wanted me to explore the possibility of restarting the bilateral when I was a visiting fellow at Dhaka University in 2007. I also would like to especially thank Dr Shaheen Afroze, Research Director BISS, for coordinating this programme with me and the Director-General BISS, Imrul Quayes and former DG IDSA, Shri N.S.Sisodia, for taking keen interest to see that the bilateral is held after a break of almost ten years. My sincere thanks to my colleagues at the South Asia Centre for all their help in successful conduction of this bilateral at IDSA in May 2011. I would like to especially mention Gulbin and Pramod who took special care of the delegates from the BISS, and Dr Uttam Kumar Sinha an expert on water issues, for presenting a paper on water security at this bilateral.

I would like to express my personal thanks to Dr Ashok K. Behuria, Coordinator, South Asia Centre, for his support and encouragement and bearing with my insistence to submit his chapter in spite of his busy work schedule. I will fail in my duty if I do not thank Mr Vivek Kaushik, Assistant Editor at IDSA, for providing all help with the publication of the volume. The two copyeditors of this volume, Dr Kiran Sahni and Seema Nambiar need to be complimented for a meticulous job and putting up with last minute editing. My sincere thanks to Shri Amit Garg and his team at Gyan Publishing House, for working round the clock to see that the book is published in time.

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Editor

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