



India Bangladesh Relations

This editorial is based on [“Golden chapter continues”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 09/09/2022. It talks about the bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh and related issues.

For Prelims: India’s Neighbourhood First policy, Teesta River Water Dispute, South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), Border Haats, Kushiya Pact, Ganga Waters Treaty, Agartala-Akhaura Rail-Link, India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline Project, Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

For Mains: India Bangladesh Relations, International Forums where India and Bangladesh are common members, Current Major Issues Between India and Bangladesh.

Three sides of Bangladesh's land border are shared with India, and one side runs along the **Bay of Bengal**. India and Bangladesh share 4096.7 km. of border, which is the **longest land boundary that India shares** with any of its neighbours.

India was the first country to recognize Bangladesh as a separate and independent state and established diplomatic relations with the country immediately after its independence in **December 1971** as a friendly **South Asian neighbour**.

Bangladesh occupies a key place in [India’s Neighbourhood First policy](#). India's links with Bangladesh are civilisational, cultural, social and economic. There is much that unites the two countries- a **shared history and common heritage**, linguistic and cultural ties, **passion for music, literature and the arts**. Also, [Rabindranath Tagore](#), created the **National Anthems** of both India and Bangladesh.

However, there still remain major issues such as **river water disputes** ([Teesta River water sharing](#)), aiding **illegal immigrants**, and drug trades remain between [India and Bangladesh](#), that must be addressed.

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How is India's Relation with Bangladesh?

- **Economic Ties:** The geographical proximity of India to Bangladesh has made it one of its biggest trading partners. **Bangladesh is the 6th largest trade partner of India.**
 - India has provided **duty free quota free access to Bangladesh** on all tariff lines except **tobacco and alcohol** under [South Asian Free Trade Area \(SAFTA\)](#) since 2011.
 - The bilateral trade between two countries has jumped to **USD 18.2 billion in 2021-22** as compared to USD 10.8 billion in 2020-21.
 - **6 Border Haats** (4 in Meghalaya and 2 in Tripura), have been approved by the Indian and Bangladesh governments.
- **Sharing of River Waters:** India and Bangladesh share **54** common rivers. The [Ganga Waters Treaty](#) signed in 1996 for sharing of waters of river Ganga during lean season (January 1-May 31).
 - Most recently, the [Kushiyara Pact](#) was signed that will benefit people in **Southern Assam** and the **Sylhet region in Bangladesh.**
- **Connectivity:** India and Bangladesh share **4096.7 Km. of border**, which touches **Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Meghalaya and West Bengal.** [Transit and trade through inland waterways](#) have been governed by a long standing and time-tested protocol between Bangladesh and India.
 - [Agartala-Akhaura Rail-Link](#) will be the first rail route between **Northeast India and Bangladesh.**
- **Power and Energy Sector Cooperation:** Energy sector cooperation between India and Bangladesh has also seen considerable progress in the last few years.
 - The [India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline Project](#), signed in **2018**, will **connect Siliguri** in West Bengal in India and **Parbatipur** in Dinajpur district of Bangladesh.
 - India and Bangladesh have also signed the **Framework of Understanding (FOU) on Cooperation in the Hydrocarbon Sector.**
- **Tourism:** According to the **Ministry of Tourism**, Bangladesh accounted for the **largest share of foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2020**, including tens of thousands of people who come to the country for **medical treatment.**

What are the International Forums Where India and Bangladesh are Common Members?

- **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**
- [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation \(BIMSTEC\)](#)
- [Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation \(IORA\)](#)

What are the Current Major Issues Between India and Bangladesh?

- **Teesta River Water Dispute:** Teesta river flows from India to the Bay of Bengal through Bangladesh. Almost half a dozen districts in West Bengal are dependent on this river. It is also a major source of irrigation to the paddy growing greater Rangpur region of Bangladesh.
 - Bangladesh complains that it does not get a fair share of the water. Since water is a state subject in India, the bottleneck lies in the **non-consensus between the state government of Bengal and central government**
 - Meanwhile, **no treaty has been signed yet to resolve the Teesta water-sharing dispute** between the two nations.
- **Illegal Migration:** Illegal immigration from Bangladesh to India, which includes both **refugees and economic migrants**, continues unabated.
 - Large influx of such migrants across the boundary has posed serious socio-economic-political problems for the people of Indian states bordering Bangladesh with **serious implications for its resources and national security**.
 - The issue was further complicated when the **Rohingya refugees originally from Myanmar** started infiltrating into India through Bangladesh.
 - Also, the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)**, that is expected to deter future migrants from Bangladesh from entering India illegally has also triggered a major concern in Bangladesh.
- **Drug Smuggling & Trafficking:** There have been many incidences of cross border **drug smuggling & trafficking**. Humans (especially **children & women**) are trafficked & **various animal & bird species are poached through these borders**.
- **Terrorism:** The borders are susceptible to terrorist infiltration. A number of outfits are trying to spread their tentacles across India, such as **Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)**.
 - JMB is **listed as a terror group** by Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and the United Kingdom.
 - Recently, The **National Investigation Agency** has filed a charge-sheet against 6 members of the JMB in a **special court in Bhopal**.
- **Growing Chinese Influence in Bangladesh:** At present, **Bangladesh is an active partner in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** (India is not a part of BRI).
 - Also, Bangladesh imports **Chinese military equipment**, including submarines, in the defense sector that is major concern for India's National Security.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Addressing Teesta River Water Dispute:** To establish a consensus towards demarcating the extent of teesta river water sharing and **reaching a mutual agreement**, both the Bengal government and the central government should work together with **mutual understanding** and signal **cooperative federalism**.
- **Better Connectivity:** There is a need to enhance connectivity in the region through strengthening cooperation in **coastal connectivity, road, rail and inland waterways**.
- **Energy Security:** As the global **energy crisis** continues to rise, it is imperative that India and Bangladesh cooperate in making use of **clean and green energy** in order to make **South Asia Energy self-sufficient**.
 - **India Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline:** This project is being undertaken through ground and **once completed will help in the movement of high speed diesel** to Northern Bangladesh from India.
 - Bangladesh has **acknowledged Indian Oil Corporation Limited** as a registered government to government supply of refined petroleum products.
- **Shifting Focus Towards Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** Bangladesh will graduate from a **Less Developed Country (LDC)** to a developing country by **2026** and will no longer be entitled to trade and other benefits that are accorded to LDCs under international and regional trading agreements.
 - Through the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, **Bangladesh will be able to manage this transition** and preserve its trade privileges. It will also **strengthen economic ties between India and Bangladesh**.

- **Countering China's Influence:** Assisting Bangladesh with **Nuclear technology**, **Artificial intelligence**, Modern farming techniques, and flood data exchange will further strengthen India's relationship with Bangladesh and help India in countering China's influence to a greater extent.
- **Tackling the Refugee Crisis:** India and Bangladesh can take the lead in encouraging other countries in the **South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** to develop a SAARC declaration on refugees, laying down a **specific procedures for determining status of refugee and economic migrants**.

Drishti Mains Question

In spite of Bangladesh's central role in India's Neighbourhood First Policy, there are still major issues that need to be addressed. Examine.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. With reference to river Teesta, consider the following statements: (2017)

1. The source of river Teesta is the same as that of Brahmaputra but it flows through Sikkim.
2. River Rangeet originates in Sikkim and it is a tributary of river Teesta.
3. River Teesta flows into Bay of Bengal on the border of India and Bangladesh.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a)** 1 and 3 only
- (b)** 2 only
- (c)** 2 and 3 only
- (d)** 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)