

After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:

- Historical background
- Anti-India faultiness in the relations
- Defense diplomacy
- Commercial diplomacy
- Land boundary agreement issue
- Maritime and security issues
- Teesta river issue and river disputes
- Energy security diplomacy
- Radicalisation in bangladesh
- Tipaimukh dam controversy
- Analysis of Indian PM visit in 2015
- Analysis of Shiekh Hasina's visit in 2017

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Bangladesh is closely linked to India through its shared culture and ethnicity with West Bengal. The language, a slightly varied dialect of Bengali, acts as a bridge between East India, North East India and Bangladesh. The piece of land where Bangladesh exists has undergone three partitions. It began in October, 1905, when the British, as per their 'divide-and-rule' policy, divided the Bengal Presidency on Hindu-Muslim lines. The Muslims, in majority in the state, landed in the area that was to later become East Pakistan. Due to massive mobilisation and political protests that eventually came to be known as the 'Banga bhanga Andolan', the territory was reunited on 12th December, 1911. However, as far as the national movement was concerned, the seeds for partition were already sown by the initial decision of the British to divide the region along religious lines.

The Muslim League, which was established on 30th December, 1906 in Dhaka, later demanded that the area be under East Pakistan during the Partition of India in 1947. As the partition took place in 1947, it led to the formation of East Pakistan with large-scale riots preceding the event in Calcutta and Noakhali.

The territory again witnessed a split in 1971 to become Bangladesh. The factors that led to divisions of East Pakistan in 1971 emerged in the period after 1947. East Pakistan always had inadequate representation; it got access to fewer resources and, despite the popularity of the Bengali language, Urdu was imposed as the administrative language.

This led to confrontation between the government and the masses and violence erupted in East Pakistan. In 1970, when elections took place, the Awami League won the elections. The regime in West Pakistan refused to recognise the mandate of the election and unleashed violence, disallowing Sheikh Mujibur Rehman to take power. The subsequent planning of a pre-emptive attack on India by Pakistan forced India to militarily retaliate and support the formation of independent Bangladesh as a new nation. The confrontation finally led to emergence of Bangladesh in December 1971. From 1971 to 1975, came the era of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman who assumed power. In 1972, India and Bangladesh signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation which became the foundation of the modern India–Bangladesh relations.

Today, in Bangladesh, there are two key parties. Awami League, headed by Sheikh Hasina, is a party which has stood up for secular ideals and is favourable towards India while Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) which is headed by Begum Khaleda Zia, is a party that favours Bengali nationalism and is not favourably inclined towards India.



Was the period of 1971 to 1975 a real honeymoon?

In the period after the creation of the new nation of Bangladesh, the relations between India and Bangladesh were cordial, but some issues did erupt. In 1951, India had initiated the construction of the Farakka Barrage. It was on the river Ganga, which flows from India into Bangladesh, where its primary tributary is known as the river Padma. The river drains into Bay of Bengal after a confluence with river Meghna. In 1975, the barrage was finally constructed. Bangladesh began to insist that Ganga is an international river so the water flow must be regulated as per a mutual agreement. The reason for India to establish the barrage was to flush out the silt of Bhagirathi Hoogly river to ensure smooth operationalisation of Kolkata port. The two nations, in 1972, established a Joint River Commission (JRC) to negotiate terms of the water settlement. Soon, differences arose over fair weather flow of river Ganga. India asserted its right of regular flushing of water of river Hoogly, which Bangladesh vehemently opposed. This issue created some friction between the two nations. Some disagreements also emerged over post 1971 war settlements over the share of spoils. Bangladesh alleged that it did not receive a fair share of the spoils of war. The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman on 15th August, 1975 ended the honeymoon period.

The death of Mujibur Rehman saw a period of immense political instability when a coup and a counter-coup were staged in rapid succession, following which Zia-Ur-Rehman finally came to power as Bangladesh's seventh President in 1977. Zia was not favourably disposed towards India. He took the Farakka barrage issue to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The UNGA urged him to resolve the issue at a bilateral level. The act of raising the issue at UNGA created further tensions in the already strained relations between the nations. In 1977, in India, Indira Gandhi was replaced by the Janata Party government, which made an attempt to revive the fractured relationship with Bangladesh. In November 1977, Babu Jagjivan Ram undertook an official visit to Bangladesh and signed an accord to resolve the Farrakka issue. However, other issues

persistent between the nations as irritants.

Eventually, the border issue between India and Bangladesh began to unfold. Historically people of Bangladesh have been moving into the region of Brahmaputra valley due to the lack of habitable and arable land in Bangladesh. India perceives this movement as illegal immigration into Indian territory. The improvement in relations dipped with the comeback of Indira Gandhi in 1980 and finally improved somewhat during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure. Rajiv Gandhi successfully concluded an MoU on water issues in 1982 and in 1985, signed the Nassau Accord, which resulted in another MoU valid for three years. A Joint Commission of Experts (JCE) was established for alternative water-sharing plans and to augment the Ganga–Brahmaputra basin. Rajiv Gandhi also allowed Nepal to be a part of water sharing thereby sweetening the entire deal. However, domestic constraints prevented the pact from yielding the desired results. The entire period, till end of the Cold War, witnessed a fluctuating relationship between the neighbouring states. The end of the Cold War saw a change in the domestic policy of Bangladesh. The dictator Ershad decided to step down and elections followed in 1991. The BNP won the elections. In 1996, the BNP was replaced by Awami League and the new government concluded a fresh treaty over the river Ganga with India in 1996. Since the end of the Cold War, Indo–Bangladesh relations are primarily driven by the policy orientations of the two parties—the BNP and the Awami League. The BNP has a propensity to incline its policies to favour Pakistan and China while the Awami League favours a partnership with India.



Anti-India Faultlines

The BNP is not favourably disposed to India and has at times stated that it is suspicious of India. In 1991, at the time of the ousting of Ershad, Khaleda Zia had led a Farakka march to mobilise public support against Indian interference. She succeeded in forming the government in 1991 illustrating the exploitation of anti-India faultlines in domestic politics.

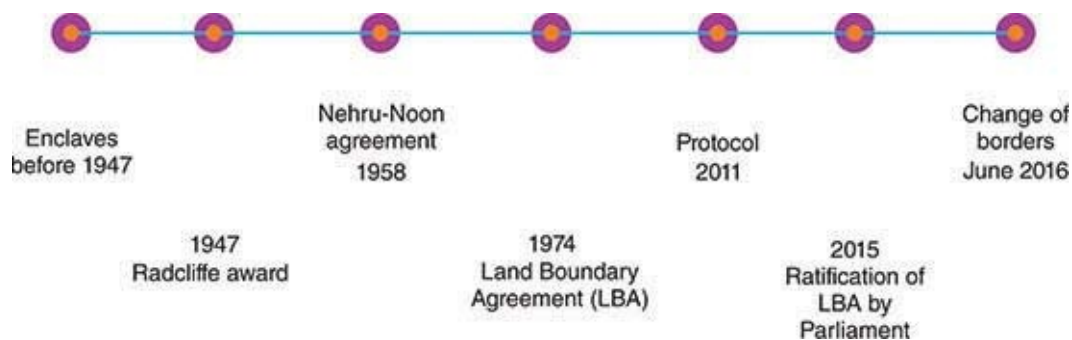
DEFENCE DIPLOMACY

At the defence level, India prefers Bangladesh as a defence market, though, in recent times, Bangladesh has preferred to receive arms imports and defence equipment from the US, Russia and China. It is possible that China is to provide submarines to Bangladesh in future. A unique point for India's advantage is that Bangladesh is a leading contributor to UN Peace Keeping Mission (UNPKM). This allays India's fears as the dominant theory is that the more Bangladesh participates in UNPKM, the lesser would be the idle availability of its armed forces to control polity and hence, the lesser would be the chance of Bangladesh becoming an active threat like Pakistan. India firmly supports Bangladesh to evolve fully as a democracy on the lines of Turkey and Indonesia. Both nations have regularly undertaken joint exercises at the army and navy level. In 2013, the nations also signed an extradition treaty. In 2017, during the visit of Sheikh Hasina to India, the two countries have concluded a new defence pact (elaborated later in the chapter).

COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY

Bangladesh is an agrarian economy but has a strong demand for goods and India has emerged as an important trade partner in this context. India provides duty free, quota free access for Bangladeshi exports to India. The trade is tilted in favour of India. India also gives line of credits and loans to Bangladesh and provides developmental aid. In 2012, India provided one billion US dollars in credit to Bangladesh and a further 200 million USD for development of infrastructure. Tata is establishing a three billion USD steel plant in Bangladesh and there are other Indian firms in power generation, linking of power grids, telecom and transport which are setting up presence in Bangladesh. However, India's steps to integrate Bangladeshi economy with India may be perceived with some suspicious by Bangladesh. It has also steadfastly refused Indian transit to North East which, in reality, might have proved beneficial for both.

LAND BOUNDARY AGREEMENT ISSUE



When India became independent, Sir Radcliffe demarcated the boundary between India and Pakistan as well as India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). While dividing the territory in East Pakistan, Radcliffe did not pay attention to small patches of land called 'enclaves'. These enclaves were, in the pre-independence era, called Chitmahals and they were used by the Raja of Cooch Behar and Maharaja of Rangpur as stakes in the game of chess. After independence, Radcliffe drew a line to divide the territory. Efforts were made by Nehru in 1958 to divide the territories through an agreement with Feroz Khan Noon. As per the agreement, India got the enclave of Dahagram and Angarpota while half of Berubari enclave was to be given to East Pakistan. The origin of the Berubari territory also goes back to the time of Radcliffe. Radcliffe tried to demarcate the boundary on the basis of *thanas* but he accidentally omitted the Berubari number-12 *thana*. The Nehru–Noon agreement resolved this issue. As the Berubari number-12 *thana* was within the Jalpaigudi *thana*, half of it was given to East Pakistan as they laid claims over it. To give effect to the Nehru–Noon agreement 1958, an amendment under article 368 of Indian constitution was made under the 9th Amendment Act of 1960. When Bangladesh was created in 1971, Indira Gandhi decided to resolve the pending disputes with Mujibur Rehman. In 1974, a Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) was designed which clarified the need to exchange 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India. In these enclaves, citizens were living with no available rights and facilities. On 16th May, 1974, the agreement was signed but was not ratified by India and thereby the exchange under the LBA could not proceed successfully. According to the LBA, Bangladesh was to get Dahagram and Angarpota while India would get the other half of Berubari.

Dahagram and Angarpota were to be connected through a corridor called Tin Bigha and India was to lease out the Teen Bigha Corridor to Bangladesh in perpetuity. Due to strong internal resistance, the Indian government was finally only able to grant

Bangladesh access to the corridor in 1992, and that too, for a limited number of hours per day. Full access to the corridor was finally granted in 2011. In 2006, the Hasina government in Bangladesh assumed power and in 2007 established a consultative mechanism in the area demarcated in the LBA. The people in the consultative mechanism asserted that they would not leave their areas. The rights of the people inhabiting the region of the LBA now came in stark incongruence to the precepts of the LBA which advocated territorial relocations. In 2010, Hasina visited India and in 2011, a Protocol to the LBA was agreed to.

As per the protocol, it was decided that status quo was to be maintained in the regions and the wishes of the people would be respected. Thus in 2011, the procedural acceptance was completed on ground and the national exchange was agreed to. Since there was to be no cession of territory, the Indian Parliament ratified the bill in May 2016 and the entire process got completed by June 2016.

MARITIME AND SECURITY ISSUES

India–Bangladesh maritime cooperation goes back to 1974. From 1974 to 2009, the two nations have had eight rounds of talks. The failure of Bangladesh to achieve success on negotiations related to New Moore Island in 2009 led Bangladesh to approach the Permanent Court of Arbitration under UNCLOS. The UNCLOS, under Annex-7 of the convention for Delimitation of Maritime Boundary between India and Bangladesh, handed over the case to a five-member arbitration tribunal. The tribunal gave an award on 7th July 2014 and upheld Indian sovereignty over the New Moore islands and enabled India to have access to Haribhanga River. Bangladesh has been granted an additional access to an 19,000 square kilometres Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). India shall continue to hold rights over its continental shelf but Bangladesh is allowed an outlet to the extended continental shelf. Bangladesh also now gets access to open sea and shall no more be a sea locked nation due to overlap of EEZ.

TEESTA RIVER ISSUE AND RIVER DISPUTES

Of the 57 transboundary rivers, Bangladesh shares 54 of them with India. Teesta is the 4th largest river in Bangladesh (after Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna). The flood plain of Teesta is 2750 square kilometres in Bangladesh. In 1972, a Joint River Commission was established to share resources of 54 rivers. However, till now the only success is on an agreement related Ganga river signed in 1996 for 30 years for water sharing. A key irritant is the issue related to the river Teesta. River Teesta originates from Kangse glacier in Charamullake in Sikkim and finally drains in the Bay of Bengal. It is the fourth largest river in Bangladesh after Padma, Ganga and Meghna. In 1983, both nations agreed an ad-hoc agreement where India received 39% of Teesta water while 36% was allocated to Bangladesh. Around 25% water was unallocated. In 2011, an agreement to establish a Joint Hydro Observation Station was evolved which proposed an interim agreement for the next 15 years under which India was to get 42.5% of the Teesta water while Bangladesh was to get 37.5% of water flow during the dry season. The agreement could not be adopted due to opposition by the CM of West Bengal. The issue remains unresolved up to 2017. The key problem relates to a barrage at Gajoldaba in India and another at Dalia in Bangladesh. Using the barrages, both nations draw water for irrigation. The problem arises due to the severe shortage of water in the dry months. Bangladesh has been

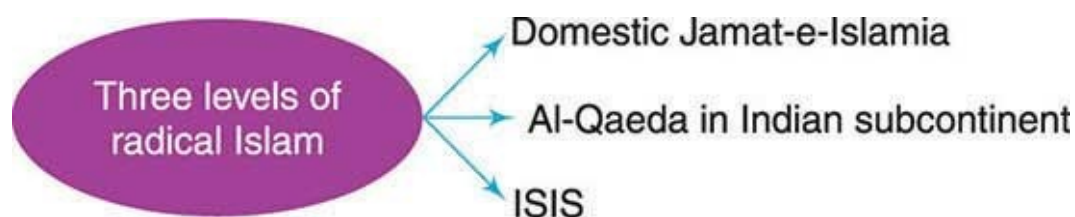
consistently demanding 50% share of the water. A solution often proposed by hydrological experts is establishing a link canal between Manas–Ganga–Teesta and Sankosh but the issue remains.

ENERGY SECURITY DIPLOMACY

In 1997, the Bangladeshi firm Mahana Holdings proposed the idea of supplying gas from Sitwe fields in South Myanmar to India via Bangladesh. In 2005, Bangladesh, Myanmar and India reached an agreement that Myanmar would be supplying around 90 tonnes cubic feet gas. However, the Khaleda Zia government backed out of the agreement, citing as its reason, the fact, that India does not allow Bangladesh access to hydropower from Bhutan and Nepal. As the project got stuck, Myanmar signed a deal with China to supply China gas from Kyaukryu port to Ruilli city in Yunnan province. Since 2015, with the coming back of Sheikh Hasina to power, the negotiations have begun anew.

RISE OF RADICALISATION IN BANGLADESH

The vulnerability of Bangladesh as a centre of terror is not new. Since 9/11, the vulnerability of Bangladesh to terror attacks has increased manifold. Bangladesh is a secular republic. The Islamic NGOs of foreign nations have been promoting Wahhabism in Bangladesh. Pakistan has links with many such NGOs in Bangladesh which it uses to target India. Since 1990, in Bangladesh, religion as a card in politics has been largely used to garner power. There is growing Al-Qaeda and ISIS presence in Bangladesh. In July 2016, during Eid, there were also terror attacks staged by ISIS.



The political compulsion to act against terror is a constraint for the present Bangladeshi government as the opposition uses it as a tool against radical organised religion and ends up creating a possibility of a severe backlash. In Bangladesh, there has been a systematic attempt to target rationalists, atheists and bloggers. The implications of all this are very severe for India. In 2015, in Burdwan in West Bengal, the bombs that were found were purportedly to be used in Bangladesh. For India, it is worrisome as ISIS is at its very doorstep.

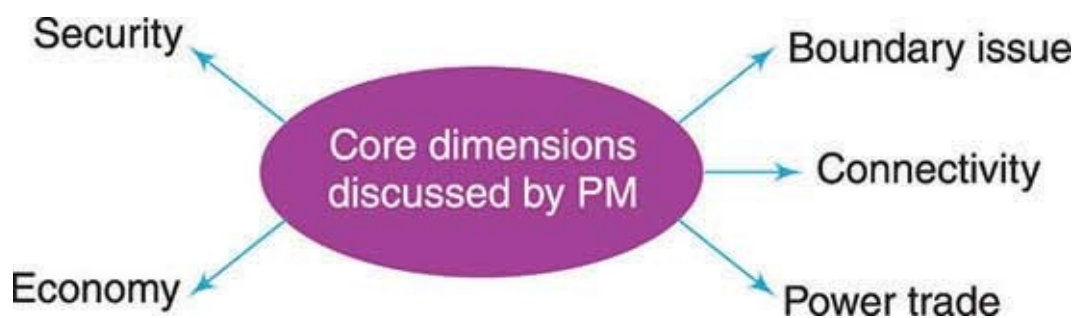
Tipaimukh Dam

A joint River Commission in 1978 was established to explore possibility of a dam on Barak river. Due to regular flooding of Barak, a dam was proposed at junction of Mizoram, Assam and Manipur. It was decided to use water for irrigation also. Bangladesh says that the dam will affect water supply downstream and affect flow of water in summers. A 1500 MW dam is proposed where Manipur being the host state will get 15% free electricity.

ANALYSIS OF THE INDIAN PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO

BANGLADESH—2015

The Indian PM visited Bangladesh and paid homage to the liberation war memorial. The PM also unveiled a new bus service to enhance bilateral connectivity and inaugurated bus routes from Kolkata–Dhaka–Agartala and Dhaka to Guwahati. The PM also exchanged the Land Boundary Agreement and a list of 22 agreements was agreed upon. An important agreement was signed on the issue of coastal shipping. The merchant vessels of India can now use Chittagong port and Mangla port to ship goods to Bangladesh. To boost cooperation on regional waters, blue economy and maritime cooperation was envisaged. India also extended two billion USD credit for health infrastructure and education to Bangladesh. India has moreover agreed to provide support for construction of additional grids and provide 100 MW electricity from Tripura. To reduce the six billion USD trade deficit, India will establish an Economic Zone in Bangladesh which will export goods to India. Bangladesh has decided to offer SEZs to India at Mangala and Bhermara.



VISIT OF SHIEKH HASINA TO INDIA—2017

Shiekh Hasina paid a state visit to India in April, 2017. During her visit, the two sides reiterated the historical link between the two states. Shiekh Hasina presented citations to the kins of Indian soldiers who lost their lives in the 1971 war. India, under the Muktiyoddha⁴ scholarship scheme, has decided to extend medical treatment to additional 100 Muktiyoddhas of Bangladesh in hospitals in India. The two sides have decided to deepen their bilateral cooperation in defense and connectivity. The two nations have further decided to strengthen defense cooperation to combat terrorism. The two sides will enhance cooperation in prevention of human and drug trafficking and illegal narcotics traded across the border. India has committed to develop Bangladesh by assisting it in skill development, energy, infrastructure and high technology. Neither of the sides could achieve success on the conclusion of Teesta water sharing agreement as of 2017 but have decided to enhance cooperation for its early conclusion. A thrust towards enhancing military to military relationship was laid upon during the visit. The two sides have concluded a defense cooperation framework and to promote strategic studies, an MoU has been concluded between the Defense Services Staff College, Tamil Nadu and the National Defense College, Dhaka. The MoU has been signed between the two states on peaceful use of nuclear energy and outer space. An MoU to jointly regulate border *haats* has been signed. The two will cooperate in the areas of cyber security, judicial cooperation, earth science research, mass media, audio-visual co-production and passenger traffic. India has extended an additional line of credit to the government of Bangladesh. India will also establish 36 community clinics in Bangladesh.



[1.](#) The Bangladesh War of Independence is known as 'Muktijuddho' in Bangladesh. The war veterans are known as Muktijoddha.