Bangladesh Prime Minister's official visit to India

Why in News?

Bangladesh Prime Minister (PM) Sheikh Hasina will be visiting India from four days between October 3 and 6, 2019.

What is the visit for?

- This will be her first official visit to India, post the general elections in Bangladesh (December 2018) and India (May 2019).
- She will address the World Economic Forum's **India Economic Summit** followed by the **bilateral visit**.
- India and Bangladesh are likely to sign at least a dozen of bilateral agreements in different areas during Bangladesh PM's visit to India.
- India-Bangladesh relationship today enjoy one of its best periods, with positive development in the areas of diplomatic, political, economic and security relations.

What are the gains in this relationship?

- **Border** - The current Bangladesh government has uprooted security threats and acts of insurgency against India.
- Today, the India-Bangladesh border is one of India's most secured.
- The signing of the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015 was a milestone, where the two neighbours amicably resolved a long-outstanding issue.
- **Bilateral trade** - It was little over $9 billion in FY 2017-18 and Bangladeshi exports increased by 42.91% in FY 2018-2019.
- Removal of non-tariff barriers will help Bangladeshi exports such as harmonising the standards for goods accepted by India.
- **Power** - In 2018, in addition to the 660 MW of power imported by Bangladesh, Indian export of electricity increased by another 500 MW.
- A 1,600 MW power station with a dedicated transmission system is being developed to boost power trade.
- **Travel** - Land routes have gained popularity over air travel, and are preferred by Bangladeshis visiting India.
- Train services on the Dhaka-Kolkata and Kolkata-Khulna are doing well, while a third, on the Agartala-Akhaura route, is under construction.
- In 2018, five additional bus services were introduced.

- In March 2019, the first ever Dhaka-Kolkata cruise ship was launched.
- **Tourism** - Bangladeshi tourists accounted for 21.6% of the total tourists who visited India in 2018 (83.7% tourists and 10.28% medical patients).
- Today, Bangladesh contributes 50% of India's health tourism revenue.
- **Defence** - During Sheikh Hasina's visit to Delhi in 2017, two defence pacts were signed.
- In 2018, India extended a credit line of $500 million to purchase armaments.
- Two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) were also signed for cooperation between the naval forces.

What are the issues in this relationship?

- **Teesta Water Sharing Agreement** – This was agreed upon by PM in 2015.
- West Bengal's CM refused to endorse the water-sharing terms. This has resulted in the current standoff.
- **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** - This risks hurting relations.
- It has left out 1.9 million Assamese from the list, with a group labelled as "illegal immigrants from Bangladesh" living in Assam post-1971.
- Bangladesh's stance is that no migrants travelled to Assam illegally during the 1971 war of independence.
- **Border killings** – Decreased now. India's Border Security Force (BSF) claims that most of the firing is to self-defend it from cattle trafficking.
- However, since the ban by India on cattle export, cattle trade has fallen - which makes the argument unconvincing.
- International rules of engagement entail that military action must be "proportional to provocation".
- This makes such killings a serious violation of human rights.
- **Credit** - Since 2010, India has approved three lines of credit to Bangladesh of $7.362 billion to finance development projects.
- Only $442 million has been disbursed till December 2018.
- Bangladesh has been slow in implementation; India's requirement of the disbursement process to be approved by India's Exim Bank has not helped either.

- **Rohingya issue** – This issue and India's remarks in 2017 on the issue have been upsetting for Bangladesh.
- It has been facing the challenge of providing shelter to more than a million Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution by a military regime.
- India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said that safe return of Rohingyas is in the national interest of Bangladesh, Myanmar, and India.
- However, China is mediating, when it is India which is ideally positioned to play a positive role in regional leadership.

What does this relationship mean?

- India-Bangladesh relations have matured in the last decade with development in many areas of cooperation.
- In a neighbourhood where distrust and doubt prevail over friendship and hope, this relationship has given hope for optimism.
- But the sooner existing challenges are resolved, the better it is.
- India and Bangladesh have a shared colonial legacy, history and socio-cultural bonds.
- These bonds demand that the political leadership of the two countries inject momentum into their relations.
- Sheikh Hasina's trip to India will hopefully help relations graduate to the next level of strengthening the three Cs: **cooperation, coordination, and consolidation**.

Source: The Hindu

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