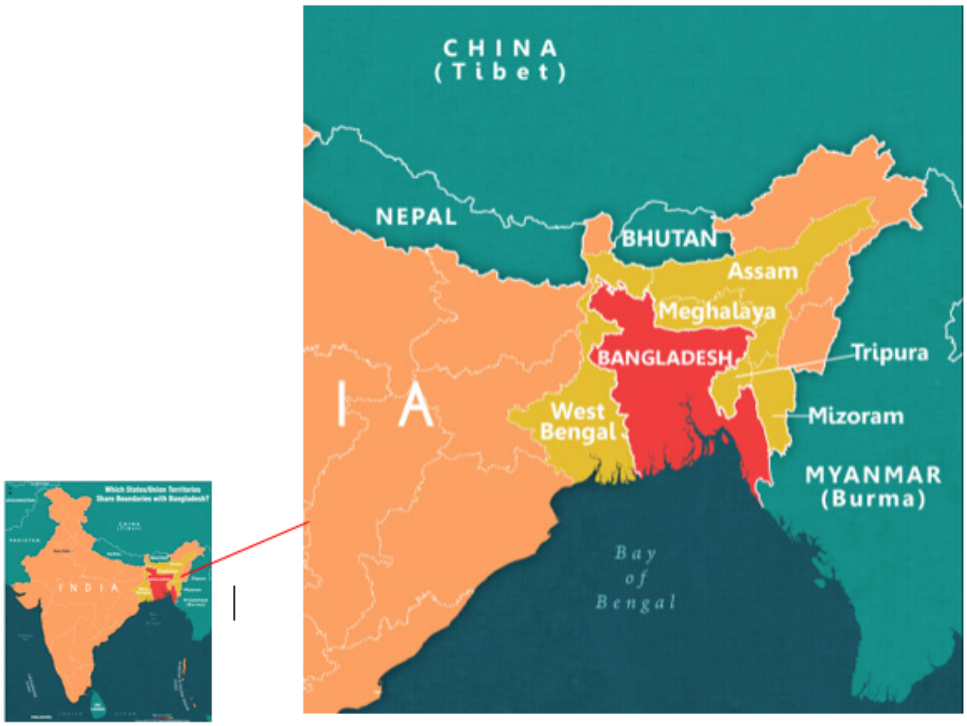
India - Bangladesh relations

Why in news?

The third consecutive meeting between the Indian and Bangladesh Prime Ministers marks a pivotal moment in their relations.

What are the pillars India - Bangladesh relations?

- **Historical relations** – Both India and Bangladesh were *under erstwhile undivided India* during the British colonial rule.
- Poet ***Rabindranath Tagore*** wrote the national anthem for both countries.
- **Cultural relations** – Bangladesh has large number of Hindu Bengali population and has large number of religious-cultural sites associated with India.
- *Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC), Dhaka* plays an important role in the celebration of common cultural links between the two countries.
- **Geographical relations** – India shares about ***4096.70 Km land border a 180 km long marine border*** with Bangladesh.
- The longest land border for India and the fifth-longest land border in the World.
- *Assam, West Bengal, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura* are the five Indian states that share their border with Bangladesh.
- *Land Boundary Agreement (2015)* between them swapped the disputed islands and allowed the inhabitants to choose their country of residence.



- **Diplomatic relation** – India provided critical military and material support during

Bangladesh Liberation War 1971.

- Bangladesh liberation day, 16th December, is celebrated as *"Vijay Diwas" in India*.
- India was the first to grant diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign country and
    - **Maitri Diwas** – Bangladesh and India celebrate Friendship Day on 6th December.
    - **Sonali Adhyay** – Also, the current PM of India referred the current state of the bilateral relationship as golden phase.
- **Economic ties** – It has grown with bilateral trade reaching ***$15.9 billion in 2023*** spanning across various sectors, including textiles, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and more.
- The Shared Vision for India-Bangladesh *Digital Partnership* will boost collaboration in emerging digital economies.
- Commencement of negotiations for a *Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement* (CEPA) and operationalization of two *Special Economic Zones* (SEZs) offered by Bangladesh to India in Mongla and Mirsharai.
- Opening of new *border-haats* can transform our geographical proximity into new economic opportunities for our peoples.
- **Defence relations** – *Exercise Sampriti* and CORPAT 'Bangosagar' exercise and annual defence dialogue.
- The newly signed *MoU between the Defence Services Staff College* (DSSC), India and Defence Services Command and Staff College (DSCSC), Bangladesh for cooperation in military education.
- **Energy ties –** India has been *supplying power to Bangladesh*, with exports reaching 1,160 MW in 2023.
- Construction of *Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant* in Bangladesh with India-Russia cooperation.
- The *Maitree super thermal power plant*, a JV with its recently added Unit II, showcases collaboration in critical infrastructure.
- The MoU on Blue Economy and Maritime Cooperation to catalyse collaboration in maritime resources and ocean-based industries.

*The **Kushiyara Pact** between India and Bangladesh was agreed to share the waters of a significant transboundary river, the Kushiyara.*

- **Infrastructure & Connectivity** – The ***Akhaura-Agartala***, and the Khulna-Mongla port rail line are landmark initiatives connects India's northeast to Bangladesh.
- **Development partnership** – Since 2010, India has approved three lines of credit to Bangladesh of $7.362 billion to finance development projects.
- A $500 million line of credit was extended by India for defence purchases.
- **Geopolitical relations** – Bangladesh is at the converging point of India's Neighbourhood First policy, Act East policy, SAGAR doctrine and the Indo-Pacific vision.
- India and Bangladesh have been cooperating on multilateral platforms such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, etc.

What are the major challenges?

- **Border issues** – Managing illegal cross-border activities while ensuring civilian safety remains a continuous challenge.
- The *Comilla–Tripura land border*, which stretches for 6.5 kilometers, has not been demarcated, leaving the border dispute unresolved.
- **Security challenges** – Having the long international border common challenges like terrorism, extremism, and transnational crimes persists.
- According to media sources, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, and the National Liberation Front of Tripura all run *camps in Bangladesh*.
- **River water sharing issues – *Teesta River*** sharing remains a bone of contention as India currently controls 55% while Bangladesh claiming 50% during the dry season.
- ***Farakka barrage dispute*** is regarding the diversion of water from the Ganges to the Hooghly River by India.
- **Migrant issues –** India's ***National Register of Citizens (NRC***) has left out 1.9 million Assamese from the list, who were 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.
- **Rohingya issue** – India's remarks in 2017 that Rohingya refugee's infiltrate India through Bangladesh had upset the relations.
- India has been facing the challenge of providing shelter to more than a million Rohingya refugees.
- **Financial Constraints** – While India committed to credit Bangladesh of $7.362 billion to finance development projects, *only $442 million was been disbursed till 2018.*
- China has already submitted a $1 billion proposal for the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project and India is now playing catch up by offering to fund it.

What lies ahead?

- Strengthen initiatives like the *BBIN motor vehicles agreement*, and the *BIMSTEC* free trade agreement could further strengthen economic cooperation, regional integration, and stability across the subcontinent.
- Both should work together to achieve the common goal of *development and prosperity for their people*.
- Establish framework to resolve water sharing issues.
- India should launch initiatives like *"Operation Insaniyat"* to provide relief assistance for the refugee camps in Bangladesh.

References

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2. MEA| India-Bangladesh Shared Vision for Future



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