

Q: How does the development of Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) project offer India an opportunity to create its own win-win relationship with China?

## International Relations Class 06

16th January, 2024 at 9:00 AM

### INTRODUCTION (09:24 AM)

- A Brief Overview Of The Previous Class.

### BENEFITS OF BCIM WRT INDIA (09:37 AM)

(BCIM was part of China's BRI project but now India is not a part of this.)

- It could lead to the development of Kolkata port.
- It could **propel** India's Neighbourhood First policy and Act East policy.
- It has the potential to offer **alternative** opportunities for dialogue between India and China. *alternate*
- It will propel tourism prospects.
- \* **Note: Benefits especially regarding Bangladesh:**
- Bangladesh with almost **200 trillion cubic feet of natural gas** reserve could become a major energy exporter being part of this economic corridor. *got*
- If BCIM could have materialised it could have created its own win-win situation for India regarding China in 2 ways;
- BCIM could have acted as an alternative platform of engagement between India and China.
- There is no visible loss for India within this project.

### Why we can not have an Asian Union?

- Heterogeneous demography. *like religion, language, culture, race, ethnicity etc.*
- Political aspect: difference in the level of development, political maturity, **different political system.**
- Trust deficit.
- Geo-political tensions. *(Geographically dispersed region like central Asia, West Asia, S-E Asia etc.)*
- **Different flash points.**

### Haldibari-Chilahati Rail Route: (12 km route)

- **Why in News:** Regular operation of freight trains through the restored Haldibari-Chilahati rail route commenced in August 2021 after more than 50 years.
- **Significance:** The restoration enhances connectivity between India and Bangladesh, facilitating the smooth movement of goods and fostering bilateral trade.
- **Agartala-Akhaura Rail Line:**
- **Why in News:** The much-anticipated Agartala-Akhaura rail line, spanning **15.6 kilometres**, is expected to be completed by September-end 2022.
- **Significance:** Once operational, it will establish a crucial rail link connecting the Northeast region of India with Bangladesh, promoting regional integration and trade.

### Significance of Maitri Setu:

- It will enhance connectivity between the North East and Bangladesh.
- It could be useful for tapping **hydropower potential** wrt India.
- It would reduce our dependency on Siliguri Corridor. *-> It also align with our Act East policy.*
- Bangladesh showed interest in joining the Indian-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project.

### Defence cooperation:

- **Exercise Sampriti, Exercise Milan.**
- Capacity building, training, combat reconnaissance.

### **Economic relations (10:19 AM).**

- Bangladesh is India's largest trade partner in South Asia.
- It is the top 5th export destination for India.
- Under ~~SAFTA~~ SAFTA India was provided duty-free and quota-free access to Bangladeshi exports to India.
- However dysfunctionality of ~~SAFTA~~ SAFTA under SAARC in June 2022 talks were made on the conclusion of CEPA between India and Bangladesh.

#### **Benefits of CEPA:**

- It will help in reducing the trade deficit for Bangladesh.
- It will enhance investment opportunities for ~~trade~~ India.
- It will also enhance connectivity between India and Bangladesh.

### **Hydropolitical Relations/ Cooperation in water resources power and energy:**

- More than 50 years of hydro-political relations between India and Bangladesh can be described as a mixed bag of sweet spots and bitter pills.
- with time new sweet spots have also been created for example; the Maitri Setu project and, the Padma multipurpose bridge (it will reduce the distance between Dhaka and Kolkata to 3 and half hours).
- Feni River to be used for drinking purposes in Tripura.
- Interim water sharing agreement on Kushiara River, etc.
- Some old bitter pills have transformed into sweet spots of success such as the Farakka barrage project.

-> With Bhutan and Nepal we look for hydropower relationship because they are upper lying areas.

-> With Bangladesh we firstly look for connectivity and then for hydropower relationship.

## TEESTA WATER DISPUTE (11:07 AM) (Existing bitter pill)

### Bangladesh View:

- Bangladesh wants 50% of Teesta water every year between December and May since this is the time Boro rice is grown.
- Fisherman issue is also an important criterion since their livelihood might be affected.
- Almost 5 districts of Bangladesh will be affected if water is withdrawn from the **TEESTA River**.

### India's view:

- India also needs water for irrigation purposes in North Bengal.
- India is producing hydropower from the water of Teesta.
- Almost 26 hydropower projects which are operating in Sikkim are dependent upon the flow of the Teesta River.

### Analysis:

- Negotiations were on regarding the sharing of Teesta water since 1983.
- An interim 2011 deal was also created but was **opposed by West Bengal** and it was halted
- **While the Ganga water agreement appears to be an example of a bitter pill turning into a sweet spot, the Teesta water agreement continues to be the bitter pill in the hydropolitical relationship between India and Bangladesh.**
- **This dispute is an example of conflictual federalism.**
- **The conflict is largely created since water is a state subject in our constitution.**
- This inhibits the centre from getting into an agreement with Bangladesh if West Bengal is unwilling.
- We can thus say that the future of the hydro-political relations does not only depend on what India and Bangladesh think but also on centre-state relations within India.
- In this way it is a 2 level game as far as India is concerned.

### China angle:

- it is extremely imp for India to go **for** an immediate conclusion of the treaty especially when China has given a proposal to Bangladesh to drench and embark large portions of the Teesta River so that it forms **forms** single manageable channel.
- **This idea would be detrimental to India's security since it will bring China very close to our chicken neck corridor.**
- **it is therefore in India's interest to give this agreement a successful closure before Bangladesh slips into China's tight embrace.**
- **This situation has also brought Bangladesh into a diplomatic tightrope scenario between India and China.**
- At a time when India and Bangladesh enjoy **Sonali Adhyaya** in bilateral relations not addressing this issue might dampen the spirit.
- After the LBA the Teesta water agreement if gets finalised will be remembered as another chapter in this golden era between India and Bangladesh.

### Partnership on Multilateral Forums:

- United Nations
- South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
- Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)
- Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)
- **On combating terrorism.**
- **Cooperation during COVID-19 pandemic**
- **Cultural cooperation**
- **News Areas of Engagement**

New

With Developed countries we make deal for nanotechnology, microtechnology, AI etc.


With Developing countries or with Under Developed countries we make deal for Humanitarian assistance.

With countries having coast we go with Blue economy.

With Nepal and Bhutan we go with Mountain economy.

Blue economy includes fishery, extraction of mineral, tidal energy, under water tourism, disaster management.

## CHALLENGES (11:42 AM) bw India and Bangladesh.


- **Dispute over Teesta water.**
- Illegal migration.
- Security concerns. 
  - Insurgency
  - Trafficking
- Drug Trafficking.
- Controversy over NRC and CAA.
- Bangladesh argued that while CAA and NRC are internal matters of India, the CAA move was not necessary.

## China Angle: or China's Challenge -

- China is increasing its footprint in Bangladesh.
- China is Bangladesh's biggest trading partner and has recently declared Zero duty on almost 97% of Bangladeshi exports.
- Through the string of pearl diplomacy <sup>and</sup> **or chequebook diplomacy** China has made its presence in the Chittagong port of Bangladesh. (In response to this under Necklace of diamond strategy India has not only gain its presence in Mongla port but also access to Chittagong port.)
- Bangladesh is also an active partner of China's OBOR project.
- Bangladesh is also discussing a one Billion dollar loan from China for the restoration project in the Testa River which of course India has objected to.
- China is the biggest arms supplier to Bangladesh.

## Way forward:

- Resolving pending issues like the Teesta water agreement.
- Signing of CEPA.
- **Bringing down border incidence to Zero.**
- **Focus on priority areas for example: connectivity (HIT, HIRA), energy cooperation, security, and blue economy.**
- **The India-Bangladesh relationship has reached a stage of maturity.**
- It can be defined as a **multidimensional fraternal relationship.**
- Indo Bangladesh relationship has tremendous scope to rise to another level of maturity based on the 3 Cs. (Cooperation, Coordination and Consolidation )

 general line in context to India and Bangladesh

## INDIA MYANMAR (12:08 PM)

### Why is Myanmar Important for India?

1) Location:

- Myanmar shares both land and maritime boundaries with India.

~~2)~~ Proximity to NE India:

- 2.) Critical for India's national security Interest.

- Drug trafficking. (Myanmar being part of Golden triangle) (The Golden Triangle refers to the drug-producing region where the borders of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand meet.)
- Illegal migration. (Rohingya issue) -> Linkages with Anti-Indian insurgent groups.
- Illegal weapon trade.

### 3) Confluence of 2 foreign Policy doctrines:

- Neighbourhood first policy.
- Act East Policy. (Myanmar is a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia + close to NE India).

4) Chinese Angle/Interest(Kyaukpyuport):

- **Kyaukpyu port** Under a string of pearl diplomacy.
- As opposed to it India has made its presence in **Sittwe port** under the necklace diamond strategy.

### 5) Power balance:

- Myanmar has been part of every strategy that QUAD and similar platforms adopt to balance power in South Asia and IOR about China.

**( TOPIC FOR THE NEXT CLASS: CONTINUATION OF INDIA-MYANMAR RELATION)**