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India-Bangladesh Connectivity: A Year after Modi's Visit

Rakhahari Chatterji, Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury,
Pratnashree Basu and Sreeparna Banerjee

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ABSTRACT

Keeping in mind the historical and civilisational ties of India and Bangladesh and their geographic proximity, ORF-Kolkata undertook a year-long study on India-Bangladesh connectivity, using extensive field visits and interviews with relevant stakeholders. The findings of the study were collated in a report, titled, *India-Bangladesh Connectivity: Possibilities and Challenges*, and released just

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before the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh—a visit that is generally described as momentous. The ORF-Kolkata report included both short- and long-term policy recommendations for both governments. This Special Report examines the bilateral developments since Modi's visit to Bangladesh and relates them with the policy recommendations that were articulated in the 2015 project report.

INTRODUCTION

India's ties with Bangladesh comprise civilisational, cultural, religious, social and economic dimensions. These two countries share a common heritage and tragic histories. The cultural cords that tie them to each other are strong, as is their peoples' passion for music, literature and the arts. These historical ties translate, in turn, to multi-dimensional—and ever-expanding—bilateral relations. Their geographical locations complement each other and present an opportunity for both nations to strengthen their connectivities.

With these in mind, the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Kolkata, produced a report in 2015 on *India-Bangladesh Connectivity: Possibilities and Challenges*.¹ The report is part of a larger project on *Proximity to Connectivity: India and her Eastern and Southeastern Neighbours*, a major research project by ORF-Kolkata. The project focuses on India's connectivity with Bangladesh and Myanmar on the east, with Nepal and Bhutan as Himalayan neighbours along with China in the north. For the present study, the primary means of connectivity signified physical connectivity comprising land (through road and rail networks) and water (through sea, port and inland water ways). Further, the study intended to explore collaboration in the field of energy (gas, electricity, hydropower); coordination in border management to facilitate movement of people across the border states (through tourism, local trade, operationalising border *haats*, among others) and the institutional and administrative mechanisms necessary for coordination among various agencies and stakeholders.

On 2 June 2015, some days before Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh, the first report under the project, *Proximity to Connectivity: India and her Eastern and Southeastern Neighbours*, was released. It is of interest to examine how the recommendations made in the report—which were synthesised based on documentary evidence and extensive field work—have reflected in recent bilateral initiatives.

INDIA-BANGLADESH BILATERAL INITIATIVES

Amid much promise and hope for enhancing bilateral ties, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh on 6 June 2015. With the announcement of a fresh US\$ 2-billion line of credit from India to Bangladesh, the highlight of the

visit was the settlement of the 41-year-old boundary dispute between the two countries. Besides these, 22 Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) were signed between the two heads of state (see Annexure). During the visit, both leaders emphasised the importance of seamless, multi-modal connectivity between India and Bangladesh to ensure regional economic development and people-to-people contact. They noted that roadways, railways and waterways were the building blocks of an inter-dependent and mutually beneficial relationship among the countries of the region. Since 2015, several initiatives have been taken by both countries to strengthen various modes of connectivity that are hoped to facilitate the seamless movement of people and cargo across the border.

A. BORDER AND BORDER MANAGEMENT: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

- ***Land Boundary Agreement***

The ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement on 6 June 2015 was one of the most promising steps taken by India and Bangladesh to solidify their bilateral relations. An exchange of letters took place to start the operationalisation of the Agreement. The implementation process is designed in three phases: The agreement and protocol came into effect from midnight of 31 July 2015. The transfer of territorial jurisdiction, exchange of strip maps and ground demarcation of the boundary are to be completed by 30 June 2016.

In all, 111 Indian enclaves measuring 17,160 acres became Bangladesh territory; similarly, 51 Bangladesh enclaves, measuring 7,110 acres, became Indian territory. The 51 enclaves coming into India are spread across Dinhata, Mekliganj, Sitai, Sitalkuchi and Toofanganj Assembly constituencies. The right to vote issued to the new citizens with the Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2016 coming into effect from 4 March 2016 was a welcome step. There are about 15,000 people inhabiting the enclaves, of which 9,776 former enclave-dwellers cast their votes for the first time during the West Bengal Assembly elections of 2016. Though this extraordinary step has given them shelter and citizenship, some discrepancies still remain in terms of non-issuance of ration cards,

inconsistency in voter ID cards, absence of a proper list of dwellers, land acquisition, lack of jobs, and absence of an adequate rehabilitation policy.

The Government of West Bengal has provided a package of INR 1005.99 crore for the rehabilitation of the new citizens and also the improvement of the infrastructure of the former enclaves in India. The semi-permanent houses of 380 sq ft carpet area, with concrete foundation consisting of two rooms and a kitchen, have been provided to all the residents who have

Anticipating these consequences of a transitional phase of population exchange between the enclaves, a need for durable rehabilitation policy for these people was highlighted in the report published by the ORF (pp. 67-69).

The ORF report highlighted the issue of border crimes and recommended the strengthening of coordination among border guards on either side of the border, along with organising dialogues with all stakeholders at different levels. (pp. 55-62).

come over to the Indian enclaves. The State Government is also providing village road networks, electricity and water supply arrangements, and primary healthcare facilities for these people, and many of these facilities are already in place.² However, there are news reports that residents of the rehabilitation centres are still not getting rice, kerosene, electricity or roads, as promised by the election campaigners.³ According to the people there has been no change in their lives as an enclave dweller other than being in possession of a voter's ID card.⁴ The total rehabilitation package in financial terms is still to be firmed up by the central government. This needs to be done without further delay. According to Cooch Behar district authorities, an additional INR 1,000 crore would be needed in the initial spell.⁵

- **Easing of Visa Clearance**

Officials of both countries held a meeting in Shillong on 4 May 2016 to discuss the streamlining of the visa clearance process. The Bangladeshi officials have proposed to strengthen their consulate at Agartala for this purpose, while officials from the Indian side have approved the establishment of another consulate at Guwahati. The meeting also assessed the current state of bus services between the two countries. The next review meeting is slated for the last week of June in Guwahati.⁶

- **Border Crimes: Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking has remained one of the major issues in India-Bangladesh relations. The uneven global economy, coupled with lack of employment opportunities, forces people to migrate to new lands in search of a better life. Various push and pull factors—illiteracy, poverty, political unrest, natural calamities—play a role in illegal migration. Such undocumented migration easily expands into trafficking of women and children. The porous and unfenced border in some parts between West Bengal and Bangladesh, facilitates internal and cross-border human trafficking along with other illegal trade.

The MoU signed between India and Bangladesh on the prevention of human trafficking especially of women and children in June, 2015 was a relief to curtail the flesh trade. The agreement provides that joint coordinated efforts must be undertaken by officials in both nations along with a systematic process of data circulation and coordinated patrolling in the border areas. There is also a

The ORF report suggested the simplification of cross-border movement to enhance people-to-people interaction by: a) easing of visa restrictions; b) easing cross-border vehicle movement (p. 82).

“The porous border has encouraged cross-border criminal activities like smuggling of contraband, human trafficking (mainly of women and children) and circulation of fake Indian currency. Though there is no authentic data on the size of this illegal trade, some estimates suggest it to be around \$500 million annually”- Excerpt from the report, p. 58.

provision for repatriation and rehabilitation of the victims which will be carried out by their mother territory.⁷ Sometimes, due to the unavailability of a proper home address of the victim, the entire procedure gets delayed, taking three years or more for the trafficking survivor to reach home.⁸

Though the MoU envisions collaborated efforts to address the issue, there is an immediate need for coordination between government and the NGOs on both sides, and community mobilisation. Good communication and close collaboration are also required among community-based organisations and BSF border outposts.

- **Cattle Smuggling**

One of the most significant changes over the last year has been the decline in cattle smuggling. After the Home Minister of India, Rajnath Singh's direct orders to BSF personnel to step up border patrols and prevent cattle smuggling, media reports⁹ say that smuggling has been reduced by 60-70 percent. However, despite the decrease in the incidence of smuggling, the number of animal seizures has remained the same, to a considerable degree, because the BSF forces have limited capacity for handling the cattle.¹⁰ Besides increasing patrols on the 64 border posts along the India-Bangladesh border, the BSF has also begun to dig trenches and laying them with pipes, serving as literal obstacles for humans who would attempt to cross with smuggled cattle.

While the two countries had in 2011 agreed to the use of non-lethal weapons while apprehending smugglers, border killings remain a sensitive issue. A recent incident took place on the Banpur border post in Krishnanagar district of West Bengal when a suspected gold smuggler was killed in an encounter with BSF forces. In the wake of the event, the BSF suspended seven of its troops.¹¹ The incident took place at a time when both countries were holding a five-day long dialogue on border issues in Dhaka on 12 May. The 21-member Indian delegation was led by Border Security Force Chief K. K. Sharma while the 23-member Bangladeshi delegation was led by BGB Chief Maj. Gen. Aziz Ahmed. Among the issues discussed were smuggling of cattle and fake currency, measures to enhance operational efficiency, and border security.¹²

The measures taken by the BSF have resulted in a rise in the price of beef in Bangladesh, in turn encouraging farmers in the country to take up 'cow farming' and 'cow fattening'¹³ on a large scale. According to Khondoker Farid Hassan, BGB regional commander, whereas the price was earlier Tk 280-290 for a kilogram of beef, now it is Tk 300-320/kg.¹⁴ Cattle smuggling has remained a complex issue, with cattle traders in the northeastern states of India going on strikes in protest of their cattle being smuggled into Bangladesh.¹⁵

“The network of illegal trade or smuggling including human trafficking is very strong and it demonstrates how border produces a spatial and exceptional economy, which runs parallel to normal economy. In many cases the smugglers conspire with the state apparatus. In this context it is important to understand how the smuggling business is organised and controlled by various ‘syndicates’ and how these syndicates are extremely well connected with the higher levels of political parties, civil administration and police, so that their identities have rarely been exposed....” (Excerpt from the report, pp. 59-60)

Besides measures to curb cattle smuggling, in March 2016, India launched an online system to prevent the smuggling of rice into Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries. The tracking system provides data on stock positions, movement, and the quality and quantity of food grains to depot officials, area managers and other decision-makers. The system was commissioned by Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Ram Vilas Paswan and is expected to begin operations sometime in July 2016.¹⁶

The smuggling of fake currency is another issue that is vital to India-Bangladesh border management and in May, a racket was uncovered in a major crackdown in Chattisgarh. Two Bangladeshi nationals suspected to be part of an international gang were caught dispensing fake currency.

A joint working group meeting was held in February 2016 where both sides discussed border management issues and decided to increase patrolling along the Tripura and Mizoram border with Bangladesh.¹⁷ The possibility of a coordinated border management plan was deliberated as well. At the meeting, the two sides also agreed to work towards the

resolution of issues related to fishermen unknowingly crossing bilateral maritime boundaries and decided to send them back along with their boats as a goodwill measure. The two sides also observed that meetings of deputy commissioners and district magistrates of districts situated along the border had resumed.¹⁸

The Indian side also acknowledged and appreciated the steps taken by the Bangladesh government with regard to Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs) taking shelter along the border areas.¹⁹ Over the past few months, the Bangladesh Rapid Action Battalion uncovered large caches of arms from the Satchharhi jungles in the district of Habiganj, Bangladesh which borders the Indian state of Tripura. In a four-day border management meeting in November 2015, BSF inspectors general of Tripura, Mizoram and Meghalaya, along with members of the Home Ministry and Narcotics Control Bureau, met at Sylhet, Bangladesh to discuss issues related to insurgents, smuggling of arms, drugs, fake currencies, and border crimes.²⁰

B. CONNECTIVITY THROUGH WATERWAYS

The ORF report pointed out the importance of coastal shipping arrangement between India and Bangladesh to reduce cost and duration of trade. (pp. 41-42).

- **Agreement on Coastal Shipping between India and Bangladesh**

The Agreement was finally signed during the visit of Prime Minister Modi on 6 June 2015. It provided for the port of calls

at the Pangaon (ICT) in Bangladesh and the Farraka and Bandel on National Waterway (NW)-1 on the Indian side. In November 2015, the Standard Operating Procedure for an Agreement on Coastal Shipping was finalised between the representatives of the governments of India and Bangladesh. Based on Article XII, the Agreement makes way for the facilitation of use of bilateral waterways in consonance with the laws of either country. The agreement makes room for eight routes with the scope of further additions as deemed necessary or feasible by both governments.²¹

The Standard Operating Procedure lays out rules of conservancy and pilotage; it enables necessary handling facilities, supply of bunkers, purchase of stores and provisions during voyage, repairing facilities, customs checks, freight remittance, transport and transshipment cargo, settlement of disputes, and others. Twice a year, or more if required, meetings of the Joint Shipping Committee are also to be held regarding matters relevant to the Agreement. Only River Sea Vessels (RSV) of Type-III & IV will be permitted to operate under the agreement.²²

Earlier, commodities were first sent to Singapore and Colombo seaports owing to the non-profitability for the cargos in big vessels to ply between the sea ports of Bangladesh and India. The entire process took around 30-40 days to send back the supplies in smaller river sea vessels to India and Bangladesh ports. This sea route was also long, increasing the transportation

The report urged for the early ratification of the Coastal Shipping Agreement, which was finalised in secretary-level talks during the visit of a delegation from Bangladesh to India from 19-23 April 2015 (pp. 41-42).

costs. Due to this there is a requirement for smaller vessels to connect to sea ports of India and Chittagong, Bangladesh. This agreement has facilitated the regular plying of vessels. This in turn has reduced the cost and transportation time to approximately ten days. Competitive cargo rates will be beneficial and will assist in improving the infrastructure of sea ports connect to remote areas, among other benefits.

Talks began in 2012 and came to a conclusion in 2015 with the signing of the coastal shipping agreement. The move by the two governments is expected to reduce the cost of EXIM cargo and will also bring advantages for cargo slated to reach India's Northeast through inland waterways from the Chittagong port. The deep draft ports on India's east coast will serve as hub ports for goods reaching Bangladesh, thereby reducing the cost to Bangladesh while at the same time attracting more cargo towards these Indian ports.²³ At Chittagong port, in a formal procedure the Shipping Minister of Bangladesh Shajahan Khan commenced the coastal shipping service between the two countries on 16 March 2016.

The coastal shipping was initiated, as the container vessel left Chittagong Port in Bangladesh on 23 March 2016 and arrived at Krishnapatnam Port in India on

28 March 2016. Tripura has reaped huge benefits from the approval of the coastal agreement. With this agreement, the heavy equipment consignment for OTPC Palatana Power Project, Tripura will now ply via Ashugunj Port, Bangladesh which will be both time and cost effective. Further, the facilitation of transportation of rice stocks from Vishakhapatnam port to Tripura via Ashugunj Port, Bangladesh is also favourable for Tripura.²⁴

A Bangladeshi ship arriving from the Kolkata port and carrying 1,000 tonnes of corrugated iron sheets was scheduled to leave Ashuganj port in Bangladesh for Tripura on 22 June 2016, as transit between India and Bangladesh becomes operational.²⁵ The consignment will be inaugurated for transshipment by Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's economic affairs adviser Mashiur Rahman. The goods will be unloaded at Ashuganj port and then reloaded onto Bangladeshi trucks before travelling onto the Akhaura in Tripura. The entire duration of the transshipment will be 10 days.

The transshipment fee has been fixed at Tk 192.25 per tonne and India has to pay an additional Tk 50 per tonne for transporting goods from the Ashuganj port to Akhaura. Also, India will pay Tk 10 per tonne for shipment of goods through two Bangladesh's canals—Mongla-Ghashiakhali and Gabkhan Canal, besides labour handling, pilotage and berthing charges.²⁶

The ORF report mentioned that in May 2015, it was decided that the first Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala bus will be flagged off in Dhaka on 6 June. The decision was made during a meeting which included Nitin Gadkari, Union minister of road transport and highway, Government of India; Obeidul Quadar, Transport Minister of Bangladesh; officials from the state governments of West Bengal and Tripura; the Ministry of External Affairs, India; and Customs and the Border Security Force (pp. 26-27).

C. CONNECTIVITY THROUGH ROAD AND RAILWAYS

• **Kolkata – Dhaka – Agartala bus service**

The decision to start a new bus service along the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala route is significant in the history of the two countries and acknowledges a long-standing demand from the people of Tripura for a direct land route to Kolkata. Finally, the MoU on this bus service was signed during Modi's visit in 2015. It has been decided that there will be two buses on the Kolkata-Agartala-Dhaka route, one of which will be run by the West Bengal government and the other by the Tripura government. Both India and Bangladesh will operate thrice a week on a round-trip basis except on Sundays and will pass through the Benapole-Petrapole and Akhaura-Agartala checkpoints. The starting point from Kolkata will be Karunamoyee Central Bus Terminus, will halt at BRTC

International Bus Terminal, Kamalapur, Dhaka and reach TRTC Bus Terminal, Krishnanagar, Agartala.²⁷

From Agartala, the starting point will be TRTC Bus Terminal, Krishnanagar halting at BRTC International Bus Terminal, Kamalapur, Dhaka before entering Kolkata. While the Kolkata – Dhaka – Agartala route is in operation, the return

route from Agartala – Dhaka – Kolkata has been flagged off on 16 October 2015 by Manik Dey Tripura Transport Minister. The Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala service would reduce by 560 km the distance between West Bengal and the landlocked state of Tripura, which is surrounded by Bangladesh from three sides.²⁸

Besides the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala link, a few other bus services which were also being considered like bus services from Kolkata to Jessore, Kolkata to Khulna, and Siliguri to Dhaka are yet to be started. A trial run on the Dhaka – Sylhet – Tamabil – Dawki – Shillong – Guwahati route was conducted on May 22 – 26 in order to understand the road conditions and other issues. A trial run had also been conducted on the 500-km route in December 2014.²⁹

- **Introduction of second Maitree Express**

During Modi's visit in June 2015, the possibility of introducing a second Maitree Express was deliberated. The second train will run between Khulna and Kolkata.³⁰

- **Construction of a modern international passenger terminal**

The construction of a modern international passenger terminal was announced by Prime Minister Modi. This will help streamline the process of immigration and customs for passengers travelling by the Maitree Express and other trains.³¹

The ORF report argued that it is important to allow cross-border jobs and commerce related movement of workers, traders, academics, businessmen, patients and groups of people having connection to cultural, social and religious traditions on the other side of the border. For this, of course, mutual understanding and proper coordination among border guards on either side of the border would be necessary (pp. 75-79).

The Kamlasagar-Tarapur border haat was under construction at the time of field trip conducted by the researchers for the report.

D. TRANSFORMING BORDER INTO ZONES OF OPPORTUNITY

- **Operationalisation of the Kamalasagar border haat**

The Kamalasagar-Tarapur border *haat* was inaugurated on 11 June 2015. It marked the beginning of the second border haat on the border between Tripura and Bangladesh. Kamalasagar is in the Sipahijala district of western Tripura, about 30 km southwest of Agartala while Tarapur is situated in the Brahmanbaria district in Bangladesh.

It has been decided that the border haat will remain open every Thursday between 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. It is expected to enhance trade in local agricultural produce, besides promoting people-to-people contact. The items that are permitted for trade include local agricultural and horticultural products, spices, minor forest produce (excluding timber), fresh and dry fish, dairy and poultry products, cottage industry items, wooden furniture, handloom and handicraft items.³²

As business in the border haats between the two countries grows, there has been an increasing demand for certain items by people on both sides. For example, there is always a steady demand for hilsa fish from the Indian side, especially from Tripura and West Bengal. On the Bangladeshi side, the most popular items are baby food, printed sarees, jackfruit, dry fish, biscuits, utensils, and cosmetics.

- **Srimantapur Integrated Check Post (ICP) opened**

A second Integrated Check Post along the Tripura border with Bangladesh was inaugurated on 6 January 2016 by Union Minister of Commerce and Industries Nirmala Sitharaman. The ICP, which houses a Land Customs Station is located on the Biribazar border at western Tripura. The ICP will facilitate trade activities in the landlocked state of Tripura.³³

- **Setting up of Special Economic Zones (SEZs)**

Mongla of Bagerhat district and Bherama of Kustia district of Bangladesh have been identified as two possible locations for setting up of SEZs during talks between Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina and Narendra Modi during the latter's visit to Bangladesh in June 2015.³⁴

E. BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION OVER FENI

The construction of a bridge over river Feni has been started in Tripura to ferry heavy machines and goods to and from the northeastern states and the rest of India via Bangladesh through the Chittagong international port.³⁵ The Tripura government announced in April 2016 that construction work for the 150-metre bridge has begun at an estimated expenditure of Rs. 70 crore. The bridge will connect Sabroom of Tripura with the Chittagong Sea Port of Ramgarh and reduce travel time.³⁶

The report highlighted the importance of border haats, the makeshift markets located on the zero line of the international border for formalising illicit trade through the border areas, and also for offering economic opportunity to people living in remote areas along the border. Border haats allow people from both countries to buy each other's products on a fixed day each week. The report indicated how the states of Meghalaya and Tripura have been the most vocal about the importance of setting up the haats along its shared border with Bangladesh. There has been no such initiative from West Bengal.

The ORF report suggested an integrated plan for transmission of surplus power from India's Northeastern region to Bangladesh and through Bangladesh to other parts of India (p. 81).

F. COOPERATION IN ENERGY

India has started supplying electricity to Bangladesh in return for internet bandwidth that will help connect its northeastern states, a move that Prime Minister Modi has described as “historic”. As much as 100 MW of power will be supplied to Bangladesh from Tripura. The Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd has erected 400 KV d/c line from Suryamaninagar (Agartala) to the Indian border while its Bangladeshi counterpart, Power Grid Corporation of Bangladesh Ltd, has laid a line from there to Comilla in Bangladesh.³⁷

In this context it is to be recalled that during his visit Modi already expressed his appreciation for Hasina's untiring efforts in improving the power situation in Bangladesh and her Government's consistent efforts for implementing the 2021 Goal, i.e., to achieve installed capacity of 24,000 MW power by that year. Modi also conveyed that India can be a major partner in achieving this goal and many Indian corporations have the capacity to cooperate with Bangladesh in this endeavour while agreeing in principle to consider Bangladesh's proposal to allow import of power from India to Bangladesh through construction of an additional grid interconnection on the western side of Bangladesh.³⁸

G. ALL INDIA RADIO READY TO RE-LAUNCH

The All India Radio (AIR) is set to revive its services to Bangladesh after a gap of six years. With a strengthened transmitter of high capacity—replacing the one which broke down in Kolkata in 2010—the radio service resumes from 28 June.³⁹ The radio station has been renamed 'Akashvani Maitree' and the service will be launched by President Pranab Mukherjee in Kolkata. The radio service will be operational for 16 hours every day and will feature Rabindra Sangeet, Nazrul Geeti, and Baul songs. It will cover all parts of Bangladesh.⁴⁰ The service is a noteworthy step towards increasing people-to-people and cultural connectivity. The initiative is

The ORF report indicated that borders of Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh converge near Siliguri in the state of West Bengal in India. Inter-connections can be planned between Siliguri (India) and Anarmani (Nepal) and Thakurgaon (Bangladesh) to enhance cross-border electricity trade. (p.52)


India can provide leadership to form a cross-border sub-regional power grid considering contiguous economic zones of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India's northeast (BBNI). (p.81)

The report also suggested that India can provide opportunities to Bangladesh for refining crude in its refineries. India's recent decision to supply electricity to Bangladesh is a positive step in this regard. (p.81)

distinct from any other radio service across the world in that its content will be contributed by both countries.

CONCLUSION

Boosting trade and connectivity—especially people-to-people relations—was the focus of Modi's visit, while Dhaka attached priority to bilateral issues like sharing of Teesta water, killing of Bangladeshi nationals along the international border, trade imbalance, and cooperation in the power sector. However, the fact remains that Modi's visit infused a new momentum to the bilateral ties and this has been acknowledged by policymakers, academics, and the media in both countries. It is noteworthy that the way the Indian Parliament unanimously approved the Constitution Amendment Bill in a rare show of bipartisanship to operationalise LBA, is expressive of India's commitment to strengthen bilateral understanding. Parliament's ratification of the LBA was not just a historic occasion but an emotional one, too, especially for Bengalis on both sides of the border. Refuting allegations about India's alleged “big brotherliness,” India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said, “Ours is a caring attitude towards our neighbours.”⁴¹ While greeting India for this decision, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the Indian Parliament's passage of the bill manifested the success of the 1974 agreement. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chief Khaleda Zia also thanked the Modi-led government.

During Modi's visit, both countries were keen to enhance connectivity not just between them, but also with other countries in South Asia. The BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Bhutan) corridor was high on the agenda during the visit. Indeed, Bangladesh is an important conduit for India's 'Act East' Policy. It is time to emphasise the role of India's Northeast in India-Bangladesh ties, which has long been delinked for security and migration issues. 

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rakhahari Chatterji (PhD, Chicago) is Adviser at ORF-Kolkata. He is a former Professor in Political Science and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Calcutta. His most recent publication is 'Gandhi and the Ali Brothers-Biography of a Friendship' (New Delhi: Sage, 2013).

Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury is a Fellow at ORF-Kolkata, working with the Neighbourhood Regional Studies Initiative. She is coordinator of the project, 'Proximity to Connectivity: India and its Eastern and South eastern Neighbours'. She holds a PhD in International Relations.

Pratnashree Basu is a Junior Fellow with ORF-Kolkata's Neighbourhood Studies Programme and Maritime Programme. She is Associate Editor of ORF's *South China Sea Monitor* and Coordinator of the *China Weekly Monitor*.

Sreeparna Banerjee is a Research Intern at ORF-Kolkata. She holds a Master's degree in Sociology.

ANNEXURE

<p align="center">Memorandum of Understanding Narendra Modi, Prime Minister, India And Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister, Bangladesh 6 June 2016</p>		
S.No.	Name of the Document	Description
Land Border Agreement		
1.	The ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement 1974 and Protocol of 2011 to the Land Boundary Agreement	This agreement is aimed at the demarcation of the land boundary between India and Bangladesh according to the 1974 agreement and the 2011 Protocol to the 1974 Agreement.
2.	Exchange of Letters for implementation of India-Bangladesh Land Boundary	The agreement and protocol came into effect from the mid night of 31 July 2015. The transfer of territorial jurisdiction, exchange of strip maps and ground demarcation of the boundary are to be completed by 30 June 2016.
Maritime Agreement		
3.	Agreement on Coastal Shipping between India and Bangladesh	This agreement is aimed at enhancing bilateral trade relations between the two-nations. Present agreement is aimed at reducing transport time and cost by utilising ports of India and Bangladesh
4.	Protocol on Inland Waterways Transit and Trade (PIWTT) (Renewal)	Protocol envisages joint engagement for using water routes for trade and transit purpose between two locations in one country and to third countries through the territory of the other. This Protocol will automatically renew itself after 5 years
5.	MoU between India and Bangladesh on use of Chittagong and Mongla Ports for Movement of goods to and from India	This agreement offers the use of Bangladesh ports like Chittagong and Mongla for the transportation of commodities to and from India via Agartala, Dawki, and Sutarkandi routes. Movements of commodities to and from Chittagong and Mongla Ports may be by multimodal transport using waterways, rail network, roads.
6.	MoU between India and Bangladesh on Blue Economy and Maritime Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean	It foresees collaboration between the two governments on blue economy and maritime sphere for capacity building, training and joint research co-operations. A Joint Working Group will be set up for further cooperation.
7.	MoU between the Coast Guards of India and Bangladesh	Consequent to the settling of maritime boundary between India and Bangladesh, MOU seeks cooperation between both the coast guards to ensure jointly marine security and prevent crimes at sea.
8.	MoU between Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), India, and University of Dhaka, Bangladesh for joint research on Oceanography in Bay of Bengal	MoU will facilitate joint study, project research and cooperation for training and capacity building in Oceanography.
Trade Agreement		
9.	Bilateral Trade Agreement (Renewal)	This agreement is for enhancing trade and transit through land, water, and railways between India -Bangladesh and provides for transit to the Northeast India. It permits transportation of Bangladesh freight through India into its Himalayan neighbours, Nepal and Bhutan. The Agreement has a validity of five years with provisions for auto renewal.
10.	Bilateral Cooperation Agreement between Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS) and Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institute (BSTI) on Standardization.	It provides a formal procedure for conformity assessment and product certification involving inspections, testing of samples and acceptance of each other's inspection reports. This is done in order to enhance bilateral trade and remove technical barriers.
11.	MoU on establishment of Indian Special Economic Zone in Bangladesh	It promotes collaboration in launching of an Indian Economic Zone along with the business units from both sides. Policies and prospective business communities interested to set up base in the Indian economic zones will be worked out by both the nations.
Transport Agreement		
12.	Agreement on Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati Bus Service and its Protocol	The agreement arranges for the operationalization of passenger buses between Dhaka and Guwahati with stops at Shillong (India) and Sylhet (Bangladesh).

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13.	Agreement on Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala Bus Service and its Protocol	Agreement provides for operation of passenger buses directly between Agartala and Kolkata with one stoppage at Dhaka.
Security Agreement		
14.	MoU between Government of India and Government of Bangladesh on Bilateral Cooperation for Prevention of Human Trafficking	This agreement fortifies collaboration in order to prevent all forms of human trafficking especially trafficking of women and children; rescue, recovery of the victims, and ensuring prompt investigation and trial of culprits in either nation. In this regard regular circulating of information and shared database on traffickers and victims along with coordinated patrolling in the border areas is being initiated.
15.	MoU on the Prevention of Smuggling and Circulation of Fake Currency Notes between Government of India and Government of Bangladesh	The agreement seeks to prevent and control the smuggling, production, and circulation of fake currency notes. A Joint Task Force has been created.
Education, Culture and Development Agreements		
16.	Cultural Exchange Programme between the Government of India and the Government of Bangladesh for the year 2015-2017	A detailed plan of action has been prepared in order to enhance mutual cooperation in Art and Culture, Mass Media and Youth Affairs and Sports for the period 2015-2017. One of the prominent points sought in this agreement among others is the exchange of artists, students, sports and media groups/ teams / personnel's in order to enhance the bilateral relations between the two nations.
17.	MoU between Jamia Milia Islamia, India and University of Rajshahi of Bangladesh	Joint Cooperation in terms of exchange of students and professors in these universities will be worked out. It will entail internship programs, joint research, publication; trainings, etc.
18.	MoU between Government of India and Government of Bangladesh for extending a new Line of Credit (LoC) of US\$ 2.0 billion	The Line of Credit is provided in order to facilitate the projects which are crucial for development in Bangladesh such as, in power, railways, road transportation, information & communication technology, shipping, health, technical education sectors.
19.	MoU for a Project under India Endowment for Climate Change – South Asia (IECC-SA) of SAARC to supply 70000 Improved Cook Stoves to Bangladesh	This project entails supply of improved cook stoves to 70,000 rural households in Bangladesh. Funded by India Endowment for Climate Change-South Asia (IECC-SA) established under the SAARC, it is envisioned to combat the challenges faced by climate change.
20.	Statement of Intent for Cooperation in the Field of Education	Creating space for holding discussions at a larger scale in educational sphere with Vice Chancellors, etc in order to create better bilateral opportunities in education. Skill development and vocational education and trainings are also being arranged. The open universities of India and Bangladesh would be joining hands in order to provide better opportunities to the students. Computer and ICT, Mathematics, Science and Technology are areas identified for R&D collaboration.
21.	Handing over of a Letter of Consent to the Chairman, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India by Chairman, Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA) of Bangladesh to commence operations in Bangladesh by LIC	With this consent now LIC will operate in Bangladesh with partnering with a local partner.
22.	Agreement between Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited and BSNL and Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Limited (BSCCL)	A 22-kilometer optical fibre cable from Brahmanbaria to Akhaura border would provide the hired bandwidth to Agartala. This would significantly boost the signal strength of Internet available in the northeast of India.

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20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA
Ph. : +91-11-43520020, 30220020. Fax : +91-11-43520003, 23210773
E-mail: contactus@orfonline.org
Website: www.orfonline.org