India-Bangladesh Relations: An Overview

Dr. Bipin Kumar Roy
Associate Professor
PG Department of Political Science
B R Ambedkar Bihar University
Muzaffarpur

India's links with Bangladesh are historical, cultural, social and economic. There is much that unites the two countries - a shared history and common heritage, linguistic and cultural ties, passion for music, literature and the arts. This commonality is reflected in multi-dimensional relations with Bangladesh at several levels of interaction. High-level exchanges, visits and meetings take place regularly alongside the wide ranging people-to-people interaction.

Wars produce the worst violations of human rights worldwide and are the greatest impediment to human development. Most of the armed conflicts since the Cold War have been internal clashes over religion, national or ethnic identity, and/or access to natural resources or wealth. Although there has been no war between the two neighbours, however there is no positive peace either with a number of issues causing tension between the two countries can peace approach give a new perspective to bring about permanent and positive peace. Peace perspective holds that peace is not only absence of violence and war but positive peace means lack of structural violence as well as a positive enabling environment devoid of poverty, exploitation, tension and ill will. Hence, in order to have positive and lasting peace not only physical violence but structural violence also needs to be eliminated.

The end of the Cold War brought a new momentum to the study of conflict resolution. One of the main reasons for this was the proliferation

of violent conflicts in regions such as Eastern Europe. The level of domestic ethnic conflicts, as well as of ethnic conflicts between communities and neighboring states, attracted much interest among researchers. Peace is defined as a list of synonyms which include 'respite from war', 'quite from suits and disorders', 'rest from any commotion', 'freedom from terror', 'silence', 'suppressions of thoughts' etc. Despite religion, civilization and culture, peace among people and nations remains elusive. The comprehensive notion of peace touches upon many issues that influence quality of life, including personal growth, freedom, social equality, economic equity, solidarity, autonomy and participation.

Scholars in the positive peace research tradition, most prominently Johan Galtung, identifies conditions threatening human survival which include environmental issues as well as poverty and economic disparity. Given that these problems are not likely to be solved in the world's current economic and 'political structure, the analysis of shortcomings of the present system naturally leads to a search for policy and institutional changes that can serve human welfare. According to Galtung , peace has two dimensions: 'negative peace' and 'positive peace.' Negative peace can be described as a static state where there is an absence of war or violent conflict. Negative peace is focused on the absence of manifest violence such as war, which could be realized negotiation or mediation rather than resorting to physical force. It recommends the use of non- violent means, total disarmament and social and economic interdependence to avoid the physical violence and discourage the use of force in conflict situations. Peace is visible when there is freedom, equality, justice, good governance, and the enjoyment of human rights.

The Buddhist traditions emphasize justice, equity, non-violence, concern for the well-being of others and compassion among living beings. They also reflect a well ordered state of mind, inner peace and harmony within

a culture. Greek philosophers conceptualized a peaceful world in terms of a lack of civil disturbances. These philosophical traditions are also linked to unity based on the moral substance of humanity in each person and the principle of world citizenship, The vision of a world without war was embraced as the core approach to peace in the Hellenic civilization. In the Roman and Medieval periods, peace implied stable relationship among units of society that lead to the control of organized violence. In Enlightenment thinking, violence and conflict, seen as the greatest evils in history, are ascribed to a disorderly world.

Peace has a firm social dimension in which equity and consideration of others' well-being are crucial for a harmonious community life. Peace thinker like Gene Sharp views non-violent action as merely an effective strategic instrument to achieve specific political objectives and score victories with non-lethal means. Geoffrey Ostergaard who follow the traditions of Mahatma Gandhi emphasised non-violence as a principle capable of preventing the origin or existence of unjust social and economic system. Non-violent social structure in turn can be acquired by establishing egalitarian social relations. The fact that there are now hundreds of groups working for disarmament and peace suggests, an enormous democratisation of the struggle for peace; even though their total membership may be small, these organisations do provide open forums for expressions of public opinion.

The debate over the welfare state has a very significant bearing on the concept of peace and the state's role in preserving and promoting it. In the 1950s, there was concern about environmental issues surrounding atmospheric nuclear tests, a worsening of Cold War, and changes in weapon technology which led to an appreciation that Europe had become the major target area. In the 1980s, the breakdown of detente and the deployment of first-strike weapons in Europe revived the dormant fear of

nuclear war. The peace movements created mass protest; an unintended consequence was that it taught governments how to successfully deflect and neutralise mass protest. The peace movements were able to activate the very best in humanitarian, liberal, and moral feeling.

The preamble of UNESCO echoes this sentiment: "since war beings in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that foundation of peace must be constructed". The aim of peace, thus, is containment of conflict. One feature of family, community, class, caste, and tribe is that they have a common function - that of maintaining peace within the society.

Tolerance is integral to different groups relating to one another in a respectful and understanding way. In cases where communities have been deeply entrenched in violent conflict, being tolerant helps the affected groups endure the pain of the past and resolve their differences. In situations where conditions are economically depressed and politically charged, groups and individuals may find it hard to tolerate those that are different from them or have caused them harm. In such cases, discrimination, dehumanization, repression, and violence may occur. Competition between colonial powers in pursuit of foreign markets and raw materials is a driving force behind international conflict.

The promotion of free market economy at both the national and international levels. Economic globalisation reduces the role of states to adjusting national policies to the dynamics of an unregulated global economy. The state mainly remains to enforce legal and political framework for a free market mechanism. Industrialised states have supported private enterprises by enforcing contracts and using an instrument of political leverage to impose market rules world-wide. Many poor countries in the world today are former European colonies and

share experiences of years of exploitation and frustration with the dominant structure of international political economy. The costs of economic marginalisation include social polarisation and destruction of internal linkages.

While both women and men are victims of sexism, racism, human rights abuse, and poverty, there are particular types of violence that afflict women more than men. Hundreds of groups working for disarmament and peace suggests an enormous democratisation of the struggle for peace. These organisations do provide open forums for expressions of public opinion. The greatest achievement is that the peace movements have raised public awareness of nuclear issues across international boundaries. The peace movements created mass protest; an unintended consequence was that it taught governments how to successfully deflect and neutralise mass protest. The peace movements were able to activate the very best in humanitarian, liberal, and moral feeling.

For establishing peace among nations, the UN's Agenda for Peace can be broadly separated into four groups: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking, Peacekeeping and Peace building. Preventive diplomacy tries to put an end to a conflict by getting the concerned parties to resolve the conflict before it become violent. Peacemaking tries to resolve the conflict diplomatically but after the bout becomes violent. It tries to get the involved parties to cease-fire. Peacekeeping role of the UN comes into play at this stage to make sure that the ceasefire is honoured. Peace building is the last stage that promotes peace and order by raising social structures, legal systems and sometimes even setting up a new government. Non-diplomatic methods of resolving disputes are the adjudicative methods where a third party is invested with power to decide the dispute. The method by which the decision is reached is not, as in diplomacy, by persuasion, but by determining the question of fact on which the parties are in disagreement and reaching a decision on the dispute by applying the applicable law to the facts.

Conflict resolution as a discipline diverged from power-based conflict theory, which dominated and still dominates political science, and international relations; and converged from psychology and sociology, which was interested in group dynamics, motivation and relationships between institutional structures. Further, conflict resolution aims to prevent the eruption of destructive conflict, facilitate a move from violent to spoken conflict, and enable a transformation from conflict to lasting peace by addressing root causes and effects of conflict.

Each conflict resolution strategy addresses specific problems that occur during the conflict process:

- Conflict Prevention: politicization, militarization, escalation;
- Peacemaking: perceived incompatibility of interests;
- Peacekeeping: violent behavior/military activity;
- Peace building: negative attitudes/socio-economic structure; and
- State building: collapsed states and weak or non-existing civil and political institutions.

Peace building reflects the evolution of policy thinking within the international community from the concept of peacekeeping to a more comprehensive approach. It encompasses a range of activities concerned with building a sustainable and lasting peace, particularly focusing on gaps in post-conflict governance. These include security sector reform; institutionalizing the rule of law; supporting disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; promoting reconciliation; managing transitional justice; and building institutional capacity. Finally, state-building is the process of reconstructing weak or collapsed infrastructure and institutions of a society - political, economic and civil - in order for civil society and politics to begin to function normally.

Strategies of conflict resolution are largely rooted in realist approaches to international relations. They ignore entirely the psychological dynamics characteristic of confliction relationships. In Western cultural contexts, such as Canada and the United States, successful conflict resolution usually involves fostering communication among disputants, problem solving, and drafting agreements that meet their underlying needs. In these situations, conflict resolvers often talk about finding the win-win solution, or mutually satisfying scenario, for everyone involved.

In many non-Western cultural contexts, such as Afghanistan, Vietnam, and China, it is also important to find "win-win" solutions; however, getting there can be very different. In these contexts, direct communication between disputants that explicitly addresses the issues at stake in the conflict can be perceived as very rude, making the conflict worse and delaying resolution. Rather, it can make sense to involve religious, tribal or community leaders, communicate difficult truths indirectly through a third party, and make suggestions through stories. Intercultural conflicts are often the most difficult to resolve because the expectations of the disputants can be very different, and there is much occasion for misunderstanding.

The Cold War era saw situations where the great powers sought to handle conflicts by accepting a certain status quo. In the view of these governments, conflict resolution meant preventing widespread violence, though not necessarily resolving the conflicts. Moreover, preserving the status quo that serves the interests of certain governments by declaring a concern for peace and non-violent means of solving problems is common practice in the world of politics. The fact is that the end of the Cold War era also meant the end of many status quo situations, resulting in the eruption of violent ethnic conflict in the Balkans and elsewhere. This

helped to partly weaken the conventional interpretation of conflict resolution as conflict containment without dealing with the cause of the problems. An important tool of conflict resolution is to monitor situations around the world that could erupt into conflict to detect the earliest signs of trouble and identify opportunities to divert violence, which might otherwise be overlooked or recognized too late. Parties in dispute sometimes seek a neutral third party to facilitate dialogue in an effort to avert violence. The nature of a conflict or the characteristics of the issues that are its focus, are clearly crucial in determining how it is managed. Certain issues such as beliefs, core values and territorial integrity have a high saliency, and are apt to encourage decision makers to accept higher levels of costs. This makes it much more difficult to manage such conflicts through traditional diplomatic methods. Conflicts over salient issues are likely to be long-lasting and to entail the use of coercive methods as a way of reaching an outcome.

It is important to note that the two countries agreed for the commencement of implementation of the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) to control cross-border illegal activities, and crimes as well as for maintenance of peace and harmony along the border. It would enhance cooperation between the border guarding forces of the two countries, and enable them to manage the identified vulnerable areas with a view to preventing criminal activities, illegal movement, acts of violence and loss of lives along the border areas. The fencing work in 185 vulnerable patches along the international border was progressing satisfactorily. The signing of the Protocol to the Land Boundary Agreement had paved the way for settlement of all remaining land boundary issues. Both countries agreed on the need for early implementation of the Protocol, including the early signing of the strip maps pertaining to adverse possessions and recently demarcated segments.

The legal framework for bilateral security cooperation would be completed only with the signing of the Extradition Treaty. Both countries reiterated their commitment that the territory of either side would not be allowed for activities inimical to the other and resolved not to allow their respective territory to be used for training, sanctuary and other operations by domestic or foreign terrorist/militant and insurgent organizations and their operatives. India and Bangladesh also rejected extremism, violence and terrorism and agreed to cooperate proactively in combating these evils.

India and Bangladesh called for more vigorous efforts to upgrade border infrastructure, including Land Customs Stations and Integrated Check Posts, and removal of non-tariff barriers on both sides. Both countries welcomed the inauguration of the border haat in Baliamari (Kurigram)-Kalaichar (West Garo Hills) and the proposed inauguration in Balat (East Khasi Hills)-Dalora (Sunamganj) as a fulfillment of the long standing demand of the local people of the area. The resulting economic activity would contribute to the economic upliftment of the people of the area surrounding the border haats. Further, both sides agreed to open new border haats at mutually agreed locations.

An entente between India and Bangladesh on transit will encourage cooperation on trade and transport, energy, environmental protection, development of infrastructure, and regional security and strategic issues. Sub-regional integration of the economies of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India will contribute to poverty alleviation, economic development, and improvement in transport and communications of the region. This arrangement may be extremely beneficial for landlocked Nepal, Bhutan and the "Seven Sisters" of Indian North-east. Negotiations on the terms and conditions for transit shall have to include tariff and fees for use of the infrastructure and facilities, operations-management and

maintenance, policy and regulations for the movement of goods across the border, a council for the settlement of disputes, enforcement mechanisms, and a programme for deepening economic cooperation. Transit facility will be sustainable only if the relations between the neighbours are cooperative. Therefore, any outstanding issues and problems that may negatively impact on the smooth operation of the transit facility may need to be resolved bilaterally. Cooperation with Bangladesh will allow Indian national security forces to counter the threats posed by insurgent movements for the creation of an independent state of Assam by the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA); suppress the demand for independence of Nagaland and Mizoram; deal with the menace of the Maoists and the Naxalites in Orissa, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. Both Bangladesh and India stand to gain by working together to ward off the dangers of radical Islamic terrorist activities spreading throughout the region. Transit agreement will have to cover cross-border security aspects of dealing with the problem caused by the clandestine use of the inland and river routes through Bangladesh territory for smuggling of arms and ammunitions for supply to the insurgents, rebels and terrorists.

Increased trade and investment between the two countries was mutually beneficial, and pledged to continue their efforts to promote balanced and broad-based trade, including border trade. India and Bangladesh agreed that the decision by India in 2011 to grant zero duty access to all goods (except 25 items on the Negative List) had opened new opportunities for expansion of Bangladesh exports to India. They agreed that both sides should similarly extend the validity of the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade.

Energy security ranks high for both the countries. Although, cooperation on energy may yield significant payoffs for both sides, there may be some

uneasiness on both sides since neither party is sure of the other's intentions. Indian companies like Tata and Mittal have shown keen interest in the high quality bituminous coal reserve in Northern Bangladesh for their steel industry, but have not been successful in securing access to the resource. Further, cooperation on energy security may be realized with an understanding for joint development of the disputed blocks in the Bay of Bengal. It would ensure a means of renewing the supply of natural gas for the energy-hungry neighbours. Although, optimism is expected to prevail more cooperation "on the huge potential for economic development and growth of the region," the downside risk of Bangladesh's vulnerability to the threat from the separatist movements of North East India, the destabilizing effect of a growing domestic anti-Indian sentiment due to an unequal treaty symbolizing greater dominance by the regional power, and cross-border terrorism, have to be carefully weighed against any such upside potential.

Both the countries have the hope that road, rail and waterways are building blocks to an inter-dependent and mutually beneficial relationship among the countries of the region. The establishment of physical infrastructure would promote exchange of goods and traffic, and lead to the connectivity of services, information, ideas, culture and people.

India and Bangladesh underscored the need for strengthening and reform of multilateral financial institutions and enhancing the voice and participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making. Both the countries reiterated the importance of an effective multilateral system, centred on a strong United Nations, as a key factor in tackling global challenges. In this context, India and Bangladesh recognized the need to pursue the reform of the main UN bodies,

including the Security Council. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh reiterated her country's support for India's candidature for permanent membership of an expanded and reformed UN Security Council. Both sides noted with satisfaction contributions of both countries to UN peacekeeping operations.

US Deputy Secretary of State James B. Steinberg has also said that the issue of counter terrorism and Bangladesh's cooperation on it were "crucial to India". Steinberg also feels that a tremendous confidence has been built between Bangladesh and India and it will provide greater security for the citizens of both countries, and the US government appreciates the efforts made by both to do more together. A deepening cooperation between Bangladesh and India would provide greater security for citizens of both the countries. The Bangladesh government has decided to call upon the Indian government to arrest the Bangladeshi criminals, including the convicted killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the absconding Bangladesh Rifles Jawans and hand them over to Bangladesh if they are in India.

India and Bangladesh introduced border haat, a traditional commodity market, in a bid to revive trade in the areas bordering the two countries. Such trade was halted after the partition of India and Pakistan, resumed after a few years and suspended again after 1971. The concept of such border trade was endorsed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India. Bangladesh is ready to open the border haats. India agreed to start such haats from Pohela Boishakh, the first day of Bangla calendar year. The locations of the markets to be started in the first phase are at the border points between Kaliachar in Meghalaya's West Garo Hills district and Lawar Ghar in Bangladesh's Sunamganj district and between Balat in West Khasi Hills district and Narayantala in Bangladesh's Sunamganj

district.The commodities to be exchanged through this border trade include fruits, spices, minor forest products excluding timber, fresh and dry fish, dairy, fishery and poultry products, cottage industry items like gamchha, wooden furniture and cane products and utensils.

Also, for encouraging imports from Bangladesh, both countries agreed to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers and port restrictions and facilitate movement of cargo by rail and water. The Free Trade Agreement talk is expected to gain momentum after the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Delhi which would open up duty-free export of garments, leather, jute and ceramic products from Bangladesh and maybe helpful in reducing the trade deficit of Bangladesh. India has free trade pacts with only Sri Lanka and the ASEAN. Five years after the India-Sri Lanka FTA, the balance in favour of India declined from 15:1 in 1998 to 3.5:1 in 2004. Sri Lanka's FTA with India has attracted many multinationals in search of cheap labour and good port facilities. Bangladesh could also see similar investments after the pact. The geographical proximity and land connectivity among India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal provides immense opportunity for mutual transit arrangements for trade across each other's territories. Bangladesh decided to give transit facilities to traders of India, Nepal and Bhutan to Chittagong and Mongla ports through road and rail. In turn, India agreed to grant similar transit facility to Bangladesh. This will allow India easier access to its far-flung north-eastern states. For Bangladesh, it offers access to the markets of Nepal and Bhutan. Bangladesh's staggering economy would also gain from the transit fees of approximately US $1 billion annually. The connectivity will also ensure higher utilization of the Chittagong and Mongla ports capacity. Currently, they are under-utilized. Sheikh Hasina claimed that only 40 percent capacity of the Chittagong port and 10 percent of the Mongla port is being currently

used. Revenue earnings will be more than double when the usage is increased.

Another major challenge between India and Bangladesh is the demarcation of maritime boundary which has delayed the marking of territorial waters, the exclusive economic zone and continental shelves, which are essential for the exploitation of marine resources.

Discussions on sharing waters of the Teesta have hardly seen any progress due to not holding of Joint River Commission meeting since September 2005. Bangladesh has insisted on expediting an interim agreement on the Teesta water sharing, especially in view of the coming lean period. India and Bangladesh recognized the sufferings of the people of both sides in the face of scarcity of lean season flows of the Teesta River and expressed the hope that the discussions on the sharing of the Teesta waters would be concluded expeditiously.

One major issue of concern is the construction of Tipaimukh Dam proposal which was commissioned by India in 2006. The objective of the project is to generate 1500 MW hydel power and to contain floods in the Barak valley in Manipur. The project will also improve infrastructure and economic development in India's north-east region. There has been intense debate in Bangladesh over the implications of the project on sharing of waters. Bangladesh urged India to conduct a joint study about the future flow of water in the concerned river system, which affects Bangladesh directly. Sheikh Hasina had taken up Bangladesh's concerns relating to the project with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during the visit. The Prime Minister of India reiterated the assurance that India would not take steps on the Tipaimukh project that would adversely impact Bangladesh. Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Tariq A

Karim reviewed the ground reality of the proposed construction of Tipaimukh Dam with Indian officials. To further improve the India-Bangladesh relationship, the governments will also have to address two important perceptions: that India gives too much attention to only one neighbor – Pakistan – to Bangladesh's detriment; and second, the imperative that forward-looking relations require bipartisan support within the two countries. While in India this is not an issue, in Bangladesh it still remains elusive. The continuing feeling of neglect in the Bangladeshi psyche despite a discernable positive movement in the last two years is a matter for concern in New Delhi. Nevertheless, Indian Foreign Minister Krishna's visit to Dhaka was well received and started the process of changing this sentiment.

A vibrant and mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh is critical if India is to better economically integrate its Northeastern states with the mainland and the sub-region, which stretch beyond Bangladesh's borders. Such a relationship could also help India realize its decades-old look-east policy toward ASEAN. Similarly, while international arbitration is being pursued on the disputed maritime boundary, a joint effort to agree on sharing the maritime resources of the Bay of Bengal could provide an effective approach to finally solving this issue. It is understood that both India and Bangladesh are working diligently to complete demarcation of the small section that remains on their land boundary, to mitigate the effects of unauthorized border crossings and smuggling and to look at a follow up to the existing Ganges agreement. Laying down an overarching vision will provide a frame of reference for the future and reinforce the political will of the two countries to set bilateral relations on a mutually beneficial and sustainable direction.

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