

## Foreign Secretary Visits Dhaka: What does it mean for India's diplomatic ties with Bangladesh?

On 26 March 1971, Eastern Pakistan was liberated from its Mainland West and a new country was formed under the watch of India's first female Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi. Since then, India has always been like a big brother to Bangladesh and constantly stood by its side in unprecedented times. The choice of the Indian Foreign Secretary's first visit, after the Pandemic had put forth inter-county travel restrictions, gives an idea of how dear both these countries hold each other. This is [Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla's first-ever visit to take place after the Covid-19 outbreak](#), which runs over a span of 2 days from 18t to 19th August 2020.

### **Purpose of Visit**

The Indian Senior Official is visiting Dhaka to personally deliver a message from the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The details of the message have not been released officially by the PMO but the visit is expected to take forward the cooperation between the two countries in areas of mutual interest and commonality. The former Indian envoy to Bangladesh is also expected to meet his Bangladeshi counterparts, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and Foreign secretary Masud bin Momen to discuss the various areas of international interests and joint bilateral foreign policy. This meeting has been successful after the last visit that was planned in March, where the Indian Prime Minister was invited to attend the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the first president of Bangladesh), was called off due to the spread of the coronavirus.

### **India-Bangladesh History**

The first level of the relationship between the two neighbours can be traced back during the times of the Liberation Movement spread in Bangladesh, where India played an active role. The growth trajectory of this relationship has been remarkably good with stronger diplomatic and cultural ties by the day. Since then, India has been more than generous in supporting the war refugees from Bangladesh, sent soldiers to fight the Pakistani forces in the war, provided the infant country with food and other financial help for rebuilding their free country and giving a lot more assistance over the years. The relationship seeps way beyond any surface-level arithmetic of purely calculative gains or losses. Both countries share a culture of democracy, freedom of citizens and a mutual desire for peace and prosperity. A good outcome of such a strong bond was the consistent prevention of militancy as well as insurgent activities in northeastern India and Bangladesh. This has resulted in fewer border tensions and better migration prospects between them.



India-Bangladesh Border (Agartala)/ Image source: The Hindu

## Trade Prospects

The main trade agenda in the bilateral trade agreements of both countries have been Connectivity. Both countries have worked very hard to help each other access and take advantage of crucial geographical spots for trade purposes. The most celebrated victory in this aspect is the Bangladeshi side opening its ports of Chittagong and Mongla as well as a few inland routes to the North-Eastern states of India to assist them in cheaper transportation and import-export activities of goods. This also gives India a strategic advantage in Bay of Bengal region circumventing Bangladesh, which is a key sea route to South-East Asian markets. On the Indian side as well, various other development projects in housing, healthcare and education, the recent one being offering 10 railway locomotives to Bangladesh in an attempt to improve transportation connectivity within Bangladesh. Various roadway construction projects in Bangladesh have also been sponsored by India to improve the overall connectivity. India's concessional line of credit of nearly USD 10 billion given to Bangladesh is the largest it has offered to any country.

## A few recent concerns

All as not been jovial in this long relationship shared between the two countries. A recent decision of implementing the CAA ( Citizenship Amendment Act ) along with NRC ( National Register of Citizens) has caused spur in criticisms and disagreement on both sides. The deportation of illegal immigrants in Assam, who especially have been refugees of Bangladesh has somewhat irked a few political counterparts in Bangladesh. Maritime disputes have also seen light in the present context with conflicts in the sea rising frequently. There has also been a surge in paranoia against Bangladesh in India after the discussions about the NRC started in India, especially among the Hindus in West Bengal. Nevertheless, like every time the historical context between two countries have always shown that both of them rise above the occasion and come in support of each other, this time too with the visit of Harsh Shringla in place, this seems inevitable.

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