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Bangladesh-India Bilateral Relations *Understanding The Influences of Track II Diplomacy*

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Abstract- Apparently, track-II diplomacy better known as the "people to people" contact is the only way of helping change in the mind set of people and enhances better understanding for peace and stability. Historical evidences suggest that, both India and Bangladesh share common historical and cultural values and social connect. There is a huge potential for the expansion of bilateral trade which, in turn, helps in peace and harmony on both sides of the border. It is not possible any economic development, advancement of trade and politico-socio-cultural relations without stability and peace. People to people contact can be better achieved through formal and informal entities i.e. chamber of commerce, educational institutions, and bilateral visits of artists, musicians, singers, sportspersons, and film personalities. The bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India are imperative having a strong historic basis. Based on common benefit and with mutual admiration, both countries are assembling every effort towards innovative connections. Our geographical proximity, cultural affinity and shared history remain as strong base for streamlining the relationship.

Keywords: foreign policy, south asian connectivity, track ii diplomacy, bilateral relations and economic cooperation.

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Bangladesh-India Bilateral Relations *Understanding The Influences of Track II Diplomacy*

Dr. Mohammad Tarikul Islam [α] & Md. Zaki Faisal [σ]

Abstract- Apparently, track-II diplomacy better known as the "people to people" contact is the only way of helping change in the mind set of people and enhances better understanding for peace and stability. Historical evidences suggest that, both India and Bangladesh share common historical and cultural values and social connect. There is a huge potential for the expansion of bilateral trade which, in turn, helps in peace and harmony on both sides of the border. It is not possible any economic development, advancement of trade and politico-socio-cultural relations without stability and peace. People to people contact can be better achieved through formal and informal entities i.e. chamber of commerce, educational institutions, and bilateral visits of artists, musicians, singers, sportspersons, and film personalities. The bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India are imperative having a strong historic basis. Based on common benefit and with mutual admiration, both countries are assembling every effort towards innovative connections. Our geographical proximity, cultural affinity and shared history remain as strong base for streamlining the relationship. It is India which was the first country to distinguish Bangladesh as a separate and independent state and created formal diplomatic ties with the country directly after its independence in December 1971. India's associations with Bangladesh are multidimensional-civilizational, economic, social and multi-cultural. There is much that unites the two countries – Apart from shared history and common heritage, linguistic and cultural ties – psychological dimension cannot be missed out.

Keywords: foreign policy, south asian connectivity, track ii diplomacy, bilateral relations and economic cooperation.

I. Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic transformation of relations between India and Bangladesh. Bangladesh strongly took the major activities here, making an empowering domain. The two nations have agreeably settled debates and finished limit boundary ashore, waterways and in the Bay of Bengal. Eight border *haats* (markets) have been set up, until this point, along Bangladesh's fringes with Meghalaya and Tripura, reconnecting and restoring verifiable monetary relations. Indian interests in Bangladesh have surged significantly, mainly at the sectors of clothing, materials and telecom areas and are currently growing consistently into the power and infrastructure sectors. (Bose & Roy, 2020)

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To leverage the efforts of economic integration, Bangladesh has offered to India an EPZ (Export Processing Zones) solely for setting up Indian industries. Remarkable Framework Agreement issued by the Honorable Prime ministers of the two countries in September, 2011, empowered them to initiate dialogs with Nepal and Bhutan and set the platform for sub-regional cooperation in multiple sectors, most importantly, in river basin management and energy cooperation (Aspen Institute India, 2012). Cooperation on river basin management will also enable the region to address larger issues: restoring river navigability; better flood forecasting, and irrigation and drought management; preventing massive land loss along river embankments; reconnecting peoples along the rivers and providing them a clear sense of rights of their rivers; and ultimately, initiating clean renewable energy from these rivers for both present and future sustainable energy consumption.

The bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India are imperative having a strong historic basis. Based on mutual benefit and with mutual respect, both countries are making every effort towards moving forward (Balaji, 2016). Our geographical proximity, cultural affinity and shared history remain as strong base for streamlining the relationship. Proudly mention here that, India was the first country to recognize Bangladesh as a separate and independent state and established diplomatic relations with the country immediately after its independence in December 1971. India's association with Bangladesh are traditional, social, cultural and economically. What we observed, in the last more than four decades, the two countries have continued to consolidate their political, economic, trade and cultural relations and have built a comprehensive institutional framework to promote bilateral cooperation (Singh, 2014).

We have been 45 years of bilateral relations and strong pledge from both sides particularly Modi and Hasina Government have conceded further momentum to the close and friendly relationship between India and Bangladesh. Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi's invitation to the SAARC leaders at his inauguration was an unprecedented move that reflected his vision of South Asia. He realizes that if India is to build up as a regional power, then it must ensure a friendly neighborhood. His reaching out to the neighbors before engaging with big powers such as the USA, Russia,

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China and the EU, is a clear indication of priority that Mr. Modi attaches to the region (Islam, 2019).

Bangladesh is located between the two Asian giants-China and India. Dhaka has to constantly balance its ties between New Delhi and Beijing (Karim, 2009, p-39). Bangladesh is surrounded by India from three sides and India has more influence over Bangladesh than any other countries. In spite of India's incapability to accomplish all the initiatives and implement the contracts signed, Dhaka-New Delhi relationships remained friendly during 2009-14. In the history of India-Bangladesh formal and informal relations, such deeper and wider commitment was only observed in the early seventies. There has been an increasing realization among the policy makers of both the countries that they need each other's cooperation in the changing geo-political and economic scenarios at the regional and global level. Under such situations, it is apparent that national interest should get significance over substances.

The illegal migration is undoubtedly a major issue that merits immediate attention and should be included in India's bilateral agenda with Bangladesh (Dutta, 2010). On the whole, the Modi visit symbolized the bipartisan consensus among the major political parties in India on enhancing relations with Bangladesh. While indicating a new era in developing regional connectivity, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Modi has occupied what was a heartfelt affiliation with Bangladesh under the earlier United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government to a new high by closing the LBA. With settled and demarcated land and maritime boundaries, the two countries are now set for opening a new chapter in their bilateral ties (Pattanaik, 2012).

In spite of intermittent hiccups, previously, India-Bangladesh affiliations crossed another significant stage in 2008. In the course of the recent five years, the two nations composed various bilateral contracts that energized the trade exchange and financial collaboration, gave simpler connectivity bringing about more people-to-people contact, and in particular, addressed a number of security issues that had strained our relationship in the past. With the change of the regime in Delhi, there will be queries upraised about the trend India-Bangladesh relations will take and what the significances will be in these two countries relations. It would assume that Mr. Modi, while not being troubled with wrangling coalition allies, will be decisive. He can now deliberate the issue with Ms. Mamata Bannerjee from a point of strength and, in consequence, can sign the water treaty with or without her support. Meanwhile, China has been creating hydroelectric projects and storage dams on its part of the Brahmaputra without checking the lower riparian – Bangladesh and India. This could be a major concern for both the neighboring countries. In fact, a China-Bangladesh-India-Bhutan combined effort to advance the Brahmaputra basin is the right way forward.

Apart from formal diplomatic approach, India-Bangladesh relations have been blessed with the informal nature of diplomacy is better known as Track II diplomacy. Thus, the momentum of greater regional integration is re-energized in recent years. But meeting all the challenges requires more than business as usual. With the application of Track II diplomacy across level, greater cooperation and regional economic integration can bring about gains in these areas and help tap into the proximity and demographic dividend, South Asian countries enjoy. Track II actors are often critical to redress development imbalances, transcend the old tradition of natural law and draw strength from the diversity of regional societies governed by multitude of passions.

They involve the interaction of unofficial or semi-official channel through business elites, major media figures, professors, retired government officials, think tanks, political leaders, legislators, research scholars and socially and culturally eminent persons cobbled together to provide new ideas, shape public opinion and provide lobby for policy adjustment on mutually beneficial cooperation. The guiding principle of this track is class-bridging horizontal network, association, partnership and linkage building than domination, control and maintenance of power hierarchy. The paper seeks to understand the nature of Track II diplomacy prevailing between two neighboring countries and where challenges lie in for the expansion of this sort of informal diplomatic approach for consolidating the South Asian connectivity.

II. Defining Track II Diplomacy

It is evident that, Track II diplomacy is "Private, informal and non-governmental communication and among private individuals or groups of individuals, sometimes known as 'non-state actors'. It is in contrast with Track I diplomacy that can be described as official diplomacy which can be occurred in official channels. Track II diplomacy is an isolated and non-structured interaction. It's always open psychologically, often portable and strategically optimistic (Mapendere, 2006). The underlying concept is that real or potential conflict can be resolved or improved with the ability of normal human to respond to good will and rationality. Scientific and cultural exchange are the example of track II diplomacy. The unofficial dialogue and problem-solving programs encourage the relationships and new ideas that can express the official process.

The term "Track Two Diplomacy" first used in 1981 in an article in the periodical Foreign Policy by Joseph Montville who was an US Foreign Service officer (Naidoo, 2000). This term sometimes used as "Citizen Diplomacy". According to Monteville, The difference

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between "track I" or official diplomacy, operated by professional diplomats, and "Track II Diplomacy", which defines as "Strategic development" between unique, informal interactive organizations or members of the nations, with the aim of developing public awareness strategies, organizes material resources that can resolve this dispute (Fraser, 2012).The most notable of these is track II diplomacy, involving unofficial dialogue between academics, non-government organizations and other civil society leaders to build relationships and encourage new thinking (Wang, 2017).

Track II diplomacy refers to an informal diplomacy, where non-officials are involved in conflict resolution (Chigas, 2003). The track may be the second diplomatic academic scholar, retired citizen and military officer, public figures, or social workers. Track II, the informal nature of diplomacy can discuss serious and potentially hazardous issues in an open, non-official forum[1]. The broad definition of the track-ii diplomacy refers to interaction with a person or group that is outside the process of a government discussion (Kaye, 2005).When most people think about diplomacy, they think of official communication among government representatives, such as Track I Diplomacy. Secondly, track ii diplomacy almost completely communicates. These unique contacts can include dialogue and exchange among influential private actors of different countries, in order to increase trust and increase communication. In addition, track II initiatives can be effective when official level blockages are occurring and when a secondary, non-governmental space is required to find new or challenging concepts.

III. How Does Track II Diplomacy Influence Indo-Bangladesh Relations? Critical Reflections

Track II diplomacy is inclined to provide a space where low-key, non-judgmental, non-coercive, and safe environment exist enabling participants to share perceptions, fears and needs without any pressure. This enables to explore ideas for resolution, free of the constraints of government positions to achieve sustainable solution of prevailing complications among nations. Track II diplomacy is an important apparatus to encourage the formation of mutual understanding of differing perceptions and needs based on strong problem-solving relationships. Scholars and practitioners in the field of negotiations rightly point out strategies of track II diplomacy for a nation to perceive and keep the momentum continue for consolidating bilateral relations in international arena. Here, we will look at Bangladesh-India bilateral relations based on different aspects of track II diplomacy.

IV. Exchange Through Cricket

Track Ii diplomacy refers to unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversarial groups or nations with the goals of developing strategies, influencing public opinions and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help reshaping bilateral relations (Kaye, 2007). With regard to cricket diplomacy between Bangladesh and India, all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who plays for Kolkata Knight Riders, has been among the most impressive of the Bangladesh players but even he has not caught so much attention like Mustafizur has done at the start. He has played a role in Kolkata's title triumph through his fine all-round showing and has been retained by this franchise. Mohammad Ashraful played for Mumbai Indians in 2009 but he played only one match. Mashrafe Mortaza, one of Bangladesh's finest pacers and captain of the limited overs side, played for Kolkata Knight Riders in 2009. Tamim Iqbal, the dashing opener, was signed up by Pune Warriors in 2012 but could not replicate his success of the international arena.

V. Exchange Through Scholarships

Track II diplomacy is aimed at building or rebuilding broken relationships across the lines of division among ordinary citizens in communities, in a range of sectors. According to the High Commission of India in Bangladesh, every year Indian government offers 200 scholarships for Bangladeshi students under ICCR Scholarship Scheme (High Commission of India). Over 3,000 ICCR scholarships have been granted to Bangladeshi nationals by the government of India till 2018 (ProthomAlo, 2008). Moreover, these two neighboring nation agreed to launch High Level India-Bangladesh Education Dialogue, reinforce partnership on technical and vocational education and deliver mutual support in scientific issues and in the areas of ICT (High Commission of India).

VI. Exchange Through Trade and Investment

The premise of track II diplomacy is that, deepening relations between two nations can and must be built from the bottom up as well as from the top down. Trade relationship is one of the major areas where track II diplomacy works effortlessly. Economic diplomacy[1], in literal terms comes through exchange in trading. Trade statistics between India and Bangladesh published by High Commission of India in Bangladesh shows that Bangladesh has emerged as major trading partner of India with bilateral trade exceeding US $10 billion annually. Bilateral trade between Bangladesh & India was $9.5 billion in FY2017-18 with exports to India pegged at $0.87 billion and imports, at $8.6 billion. Bangladesh's exports to India crossed US $ 1.0 billion

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mark in 2019 (High Commission of India). Previously, in the fiscal year 2013-14, the bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh was USD 6.6 billion where India's exports at USD 6.1 billion and imports from Bangladesh at USD 462 million which is more than twice from five years ago from that time when the value was USD 2.7 billion. The cabinet of Bangladesh approved a trade deal with India which was actually a revised trade deal to use each countries land and water routs by both countries to send goods in a third country which removed the barrier of regional trade. This deal of trade will be expanded after every five years if no objection stands between this two countries[1].

VII. Exchange Through Health

For the sake of amicable solution through exchange, very peaceful interaction at citizen level must exist. Likewise, for any settlement that is eventually reached, there must be mutual understanding through which a nation can reshape trust and confidence in other nation. Bangladesh directly and indirectly contributes in the health and medical tourism in India. In 2015-16 fiscal year, a statistics showed that every one in three foreign patients in India were from Bangladesh. According to the Director General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, among 460000 inbound patients, 165000 patients were from Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi patients made contribution 50% of the total revenue from medical tourism which is 35% of the input of foreign patients. Over 58,000 medical visas were delivered in that time period. According to the government report Bangladesh is the largest foreign user in India in 2015-16 fiscal year. As a large number of Bangladeshi patients are receiving Indian medical facilities, for this reason, Indian government extended the visa facility for Bangladeshi patients. For the growing trend of Bangladeshi contribution in Indian medical as well as others sector, both side have expanded the routes of travel. New transport service as well as new railway rout has been announced. Rail link between Khulna and Kolkata were inaugurated during the visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in India (bdnews24.com, 2017).

VIII. Cultural Exchange

It is thought that cultural programme not only enriches the cultural dimension but also promotes cross cultural co-operation between India and Bangladesh. Cultural exchange is very important for the enhancing the bilateral relations. Culture is a very important medium that fosters better understanding and appreciation in different levels. The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre organizes different cultural programs featuring both Indian and Bangladeshi artists. Besides lots of Bangladeshi artists also perform in India. 93 cultural events were organized in cultural center last year. It always encourages promising young and emerging artists. Not necessary those who are already famous, but those who have lots of enthusiasm and potential (High Commission of India, 2017).

Bangladesh and India's geographical positions complement each other and enable the prospects for both to advance their connectivity links and economies. The relationship is deepening as high-level economic exchanges through visits and meetings take place regularly alongside the wide ranging people-to-people interaction which is meant as Tack II Diplomacy. Major inquiry of the essay is to deepen our understanding about the consequences of Modi Government in the bilateral relations of Bangladesh with India. What we observed, in the last more than four decades, the two countries have continued to consolidate their political, economic, trade and cultural relations and have built a comprehensive institutional framework to promote bilateral cooperation.

IX. Conclusion

We have been around 48 years of bilateral relations and strong pledge from both sides, particularly Modi and Hasina Government have conceded further momentum to the close and friendly relationship between India and Bangladesh. His reaching out to the neighbors before engaging with big powers such as the USA, Russia, China and the EU, is a clear indication of priority that Modi attaches to the region for strengthening political strategy. In this context, Bangladesh should be close to the top of Modi's agenda, because Bangladesh not only shares the longest international border with India (3,500 km) and is her biggest economic and industrial trading partner within SAARC (over $ 5 bn. in 2012-13), it also grasps a key tactical position vis-à-vis India's connectivity to South East Asia, and China. Visit of the Prime Minister of India Mr. Modi from 6-7 June 2015 in Dhaka aided accelerating the bilateral ties between two countries.

There may be several misunderstanding and debates between these two neighboring countries, India and Bangladesh, but if there is a people-to-people contact among the people of these two countries, it braces the network between us. It also helps in the expansion of non-fundamental judgements and both nations will get stimulated for socio-economic advancement. The youth wants to work together and emphasize new areas of cooperation, despite having differences in security and migration concerns from India's point of view. Our mutual cooperation is based on a win-win principle for both countries, based on a mutuality of interests. We trust that harmony and safety in the region, which is necessary for economic progression and improvement, is our collective obligation.

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Undoubtedly, Bangladesh and India relations should be entrusted with a multi-party, multi-stakeholder affair. Because at the end of the day, a consensual vision of this particular tie has to be created for a relationship with such a principal neighbor for better regional integrity. Apart from formal relations between Indian government and Bangladesh government, we have to bring in members of different cross-sections of stakeholders and civil society.

Given the recurrent challenges posed through the wave of globalization, if governments are not actively interacting with each other, the productivity is reduced. Conversely, young academics and professionals of Bangladesh want friendly relations with India based on commonness in culture, heritage and political systems despite disputes on water, transit and trade issues. They want Bangladesh to develop economically, socially and culturally as well hand in hand with emerging India. Present ties between the two countries are good but interactions need to be institutionalized to deepen the relationship in coming days ahead. We need to have a forward approach so that we can come over with the past heritage based on the spirit of track-II diplomacy.

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