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1. Historic Maritime Breakthrough: A Turning Point in Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations

Introduction



A significant moment in South Asian geopolitics unfolded recently when a cargo ship from Karachi arrived at Chattogram (formerly Chittagong) port, establishing the first-ever direct maritime contact between Pakistan and Bangladesh. This move, hailed by the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka as a "major step in bilateral trade," suggests a possible shift in the historically tense relationship between the two countries, especially after the political changes in Bangladesh following Sheikh Hasina's ouster.

The Lingering Shadow of 1971

The relationship between Bangladesh and Pakistan has long been clouded by the brutal events of 1971:

- **Historical Atrocities:** During the nine-month Liberation War, the Pakistani military, with the support of local collaborators, committed widespread atrocities, leaving around 3 million people dead and thousands more tortured and raped. These memories are deeply ingrained in the Bangladeshi national consciousness.
- **Lack of Apology:** Pakistan has never formally apologized for its actions during the war, which continues to hamper bilateral ties. Political scientist Ali Riaz notes that a public apology is essential for healing the wounds of the past.
- **Conflicting Narratives:** While Bangladesh views 1971 as a war of liberation, Pakistan's narrative often frames it as an Indian conspiracy to break up the country. This stance, supported by the Pakistani military, makes an official apology unlikely.

Hasina's Tenure: A Tense Relationship

Sheikh Hasina's leadership (1996-2001, 2009-2024) was marked by a hardline stance on historical accountability:

- **War Crimes Tribunal:** Hasina set up the International Crimes Tribunal in 2010 to prosecute those involved in 1971 war crimes, leading to multiple convictions and executions of pro-Pakistan collaborators, particularly members of Jamaat-e-Islami.

- **Strained Relations with Pakistan:** Pakistan's criticism of these trials, including the execution of Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah, further strained ties. Hasina viewed Pakistan's reaction as proof that it had not fully accepted Bangladesh's independence.

- **Closer Ties with India:** Hasina strengthened Bangladesh's relationship with India, leveraging their historical support during the Liberation War. Her personal rapport with India's political elite and her crackdown on terrorism solidified the India-Bangladesh partnership.

A New Opening for Pakistan

The ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 has created an opportunity for Pakistan to reset its relationship with Bangladesh. Three factors are at play:

1. **Changing Political Sentiment:** For younger Bangladeshis who did not experience the 1971 conflict firsthand, the emotional weight of that era is diminishing. Rising economic and social challenges have shifted their focus away from historical grievances.

2. **Anti-India Sentiment:** Hasina's close ties with New Delhi sparked resentment among some Bangladeshis who viewed India as too involved in their national affairs. This frustration was evident when a mob attacked the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre in Dhaka.

3. **Islamist Influence:** The post-Hasina political landscape includes a stronger presence of the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami, which opposes the 1971 Liberation War narrative and aligns more closely with Pakistan's views.

The Way Forward: A Diplomatic Thaw

Recognizing the changing dynamics, Pakistan has been quick to extend an olive branch to Bangladesh:

- **Calls for Reconciliation:** Pakistani commentators have urged both countries to move past the bitterness of 1971. Retired diplomat Burhanul Islam emphasized the need to rebuild ties in a changing geopolitical context.

- **Positive Response from Dhaka:** The interim Bangladeshi government, led by Muhammad Yunus, has shown openness to Pakistan's outreach. During a meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the United Nations General Assembly, Yunus stressed the need to turn a "new page" in bilateral cooperation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. Inauguration of first trilateral power transaction – from Nepal to Bangladesh through the Indian Grid

Introduction



Union Minister for Power and Housing & Urban Affairs, Shri Manohar Lal, jointly inaugurated the power flow from Nepal to Bangladesh, alongwith Md. Fouzul Kabir Khan, Adviser, Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, Government of Bangladesh and Mr. Dipak Khadka, Minister of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Government of Nepal through a virtual event. This historic occasion marks the first

trilateral power transaction which has been carried out through the Indian grid.

Trilateral power transaction

The Government of India had announced its decision to facilitate the first trilateral power transaction from Nepal to Bangladesh, through Indian grid with an export of upto 40 MW of power during the visit of the former Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' to India from 31 May to 3 June 2023. During the visit, both sides had expressed their commitment towards greater sub-regional cooperation, including in the energy sector, which would lead to increased inter-linkages between the economies for mutual benefit of all stakeholders.

Subsequently, a tripartite power sales agreement between NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam, Nepal Electricity Authority and Bangladesh Power Development Board was signed on 3 October 2024 in Kathmandu.

The start of this power flow from Nepal to Bangladesh through India is expected to boost sub-regional connectivity in the power sector.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: PIB

3. Will Riyadh summit impact the Gaza war?

Introduction



Saudi Arabia hosted a summit of leaders from Arab and Islamic countries last week to discuss the Palestine question. The summit demanded an immediate end to Israel's military aggression on Gaza and Lebanon.

What did leaders say?

The leaders condemned the Israeli military's "shocking and horrific crimes", its "crime of genocide", and "ethnic cleansing" in Gaza, and called for an "independent, credible" international committee to investigate these crimes. It urged for measures to end the Israeli occupation and "establish an independent, sovereign Palestinian state on the lines of

June 4, 1967, with occupied Al-Quds [Jerusalem] as its capital, based on the two-state solution, and in accordance with the approved references and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.”

What is the significance of the summit?

In recent years, Arab countries had shown a willingness to improve or even normalise ties with Israel bypassing the Palestine question, in violation of the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative, which promised recognition to Israel in return for the creation of a Palestine state. In 2020, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan normalised ties with Israel in an agreement called the Abraham Accords. In the past, Arab-Israel normalisation — Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994 — came with some Israeli compromises. Israel signed the Framework for Peace in the Middle East with Egypt in 1979 (following the Camp David Agreement), agreeing to establish an autonomous Palestinian self-governing authority in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, and the Israel-Jordan agreement (the Wadi Araba Treaty) following the 1993 Oslo Agreement, which laid the foundations of the Palestine National Authority.

But when the Abraham Accords were signed, the Palestinians got nothing. After the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack and Israel’s retaliatory war on Gaza (and the West Bank), Arabs condemned the Israeli actions but stopped short of provoking the Jewish state. However, their unease and anger over the war Israel was carrying out were on display. In the Riyadh summit, they expressed their collective anger and sent a message to both Israel and the U.S. that resolving the Palestine question is key to peace in West Asia.

Where do Saudi-Israel ties stand?

In September 2023, Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi Crown Prince, and Prime Minister, said the kingdom was in an advanced stage of finalising a normalisation agreement with Israel. For both the U.S. and Israel, an agreement with Saudi Arabia was the logical next step of the normalisation process. Arab countries were also increasingly wary of Iran and they seemed ready to bolster ties with Israel and build a joint defensive shield against potential Iranian threats. Then came the October 7 attack, and Israel’s war on Gaza. Saudi Arabia and the UAE see the Hamas brand of political Islam as a threat to their monarchical systems. But they cannot ignore the mood in the Arab Street and West Asia, which is predominantly anti-Israel and pro-Palestine. A few months after the war, the Saudis said any future agreement with Israel should be linked to resolving the Palestine issue. On September 18, Crown Prince Mohammed said, “The kingdom will not cease its tireless efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and we affirm that the kingdom will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without one.” At the opening of the Riyadh summit, MBS, as Prince Mohammed is popularly known, said Israel was committing “genocide” in Gaza, in his harshest criticism of the war. This points to a steady deterioration in Saudi-Israel ties over the past year.

Will the Arabs join the war?

Very unlikely. The last time an Arab country attacked Israel was in 1973 when Egypt, along with Syria, launched a surprise offensive in Sinai and Golan, Egyptian and Syrian territories, respectively, that were captured by Israel in 1967. Egypt launched the attack to get its territory back, not for the Palestinians. Ever since, peace between Israel and Arab states prevailed, irrespective of Israel’s military occupation of the Palestinian territories. That status quo is unlikely to change as no Arab country has the stomach to go to war against Israel. But before the October 7 attack, Arabs were moving closer to formalising their relationship with the Jewish

state — that push has now been derailed. Now, even the UAE, which had close ties with Israel, says it “is not ready to support the day after the war in Gaza without the establishment of a Palestinian state”. Arab countries have also entered into a detente with Iran, bringing their decades-long rivalry with the Shia state to a tactical halt.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Hindu

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