



BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN RELATIONS: A BEACON OF HOPE FOR REGIONAL PROSPERITY



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An Opinion Piece on

Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations: A Beacon of Hope for Regional Prosperity

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After decades of dormancy in relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan, recent contact between the two heads of states has signalled hope of improvement in diplomatic ties. Political and economic compulsions appear to be taking the leadership of Pakistan and Bangladesh towards



revitalizing bilateral diplomatic ties following a rare telephonic talk between the two counterparts on July 22. However, the process of reconciliation did not just begin with the phone call as significant developments to rebuild ties between the two countries have long been in motion.

Despite the general unfriendly political environment, trade has been considered one of the major factors raising hopes of a breakthrough in their otherwise tough relationship. Mr. Khan, in his conversation, underscored the importance Pakistan attaches to closer ties with Bangladesh and highlighted the significance of regular bilateral contacts and people-to-people exchanges. He also reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to SAARC and underlined the importance of both countries working for enhanced regional cooperation for sustainable peace and development.



There is no denying the fact that the establishment of the Muslim League in Dhaka and the mutual struggle during the Pakistan movement manifest a very strong bond of brotherhood. Muslims of both sides fought shoulder to shoulder in their

freedom struggle both from British Raj and Hindutva oppression. The people of both countries are deep-rooted in terms of cultural and spiritual affiliations. Unfortunately, the unjust distribution of resources at the eve of independence and excessive Indian involvement in the internal affairs of Pakistan, later on, led to the political turmoil. The Bangladesh-Pakistan relationship took a dramatic turn following Ms. Wajed's second tenure as the prime minister in 2009 when she endorsed the resumption of the 1971 trial. Pakistan has always considered the bitter past of the 1971 dismemberment as a closed chapter. Moreover, if we look it in context of the tripartite agreement signed in April 1974 for repatriation of war prisoners, Ms. Wajed's father and Bangladesh's founding father Mujibur Rehman had agreed that in the interest of regional peace, no one would be put on trial.

Recent expectations of an improvement in Bangladesh-Pakistan ties are followed by the turning aside of Delhi-Dhaka ties following the enactment of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act by India last year. It is the outcome of some serious strategic miscalculations and blunders by the Modi-led RSS-BJP government over time. The basic flaw in PM Modi's political philosophy and style of governance lies in the overwhelming influence of the RSS-inspired Hindutva ideology on statecraft, governance, policy formulation, and decision making to achieve political and other objectives. Domestically, this manifested itself in the ruthless treatment meted out to Indian and Kashmiri Muslims; first in Gujrat, then all over India and finally in Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJ&K). However, this unnatural

an inspired policy formulation and decision making came to serious grief when it was applied to achieve foreign policy objectives. Quite obviously, the xenophobic ideology and the norms and principles of international relations, geopolitics, and geostrategic are mutually exclusive.

With the world becoming a global village, the importance of regional cooperation has increased manifold. Regional economic cooperation can make possible increased communication and trade connectivity through joint physical investments and unity of policies, rules, and procedures. Regional cooperation can promote economic and financial stability by adopting harmonized fiscal, monetary, and

exchange rate policies to prevent financial crisis; addressing shared systemic risks in the banking sector; implementing common regulation and supervisory standards; sharing lessons and experience from the implementation of countercyclical policies during crisis periods. There is no denying the fact that the role of China in regional progress and prosperity is of paramount importance.

Talking specifically of Asia, China is indeed the ASIAN DRAGON. Another important factor is the notion of equality that is vehemently followed by China while leading the region from the front. In this respect, China's close strategic and economic cooperation with Pakistan could help in bridging the diplomatic gap between Dhaka and Islamabad.



Pakistan is a member of the Economic Cooperation Organization and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for more than three decades. It is also a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Bangladesh can benefit from Pak-China strategic and economic partnerships which can pave the former's way to ECO and SCO. Having a significant economic potential, the inclusion of Bangladesh in these organizations can help a great deal in boosting Bangladesh's economic progress. Following the vitality of these forums, it will also increase Bangladesh's diplomatic reach, ultimately helping the country to play an increased and vibrant role in world politics. Moreover, SCO, with both security and economic cooperation in its scope, presents even brighter prospects for Pakistan for a broader regional level engagement. In this respect, Pakistan can do a lot in terms of increasing Bangladesh's role in the region and beyond.

Pakistan and Bangladesh can share greater opportunities for increased bilateral economic cooperation. Both can improve their trade relations through public-private partnerships (PPP) and economic zones. “Bangladesh is among the top export destinations of Pakistan in Asia after China and Afghanistan”. Pakistan’s major exports to Bangladesh include woven cotton fabrics, cotton yarn, raw sugar, raw cotton, tanned leather, machinery, its parts, and synthetic fabrics including silk and woolen. Pakistan’s main items of imports from Bangladesh are raw jute, tea, yarn & thread of synthetic fibers and tobacco. Pakistan’s exports to Bangladesh increased from US\$ 618 million in 2017 to the level of US\$ 752.67 million in 2018-19. With deeper trade, investment and connectivity linkages within the sub-region, Bangladesh and Pakistan can benefit from new markets, new import sources of high quality and better-priced products, increasing opportunities for transport and logistics services.



Muslim Ummah is confronted by many challenges nowadays in which the lack of unity, trust, collective approach, leadership, and cooperation are of prime importance. The idea of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) was carved out to unite Muslim Ummah while mitigating peculiar types of religious, spiritual, and cultural differences among Muslims. Mutual cooperation, bilateral as well as governance issues faced by Muslim countries are some of its top priorities. Being the second-largest organization, the significance and relevance of OIC are increasing day-by-day. Four major objectives that are addressed by OIC are the protection

and liberation of Al-Quds, Kashmir, to address Islamophobia and terrorism. Although it is faced by many challenges on political fronts, enormous human potential presents great opportunities. OIC can also provide an effective platform to strengthen Bangladesh-Pakistan relations as both countries are the founding members of OIC. Areas of mutual interest can also be sorted out through this forum especially related to the role of Muslim countries in global politics. Visionary political leadership can make it the most effective organization in the world. OIC will help in resolving outstanding issues of not only member countries but also that of Muslim minorities around the world.

Conclusion

The whole scenario speaks clear of the reality that the bilateral cooperation offers greater potential and enormous opportunities. Invitation of PM Imran Khan to Sheikh Hasina to visit Islamabad and statements of foreign offices of both countries are signalling a new epoch of friendly relations in the required manner. However, complete restoration depends upon the perpetuity of bilateral relations and diplomatic efforts while setting aside unnecessary dogmas embedded by actors of disturbances in the region. Pak-China cooperation can help the inclusion of Bangladesh in regional organizations like ECO and SCO. It will help Bangladesh a great deal in doubling its economic potential. There is greater bilateral trade potential available, which is in the best interests of both countries. Improved ties between both two countries will deliver lasting peace, progress, and prosperity for countries, regions, and beyond.

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