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Chapter I

Abstract

Over recent years Bangladesh has managed to receive plenty of investments from China and India. The dissertation answers how Bangladesh, being a small state, has been able to benefit from two rival powers, China and India, at the same time without being completely aligned with either one. Small states usually tend to balance one powerful state by bandwagoning with another one. In South Asia, it seems Bangladesh has successfully avoided the tendency and retained its strategic autonomy up to some point.

For how long Bangladesh will continue to stay equally open to China and India or choose one over another in years to come remains unanswered in much of International Relations (IR) literature. Many IR theories suggesting small states having less bargaining capacities in affairs with their powerful counterparts simply do not apply here.

Here the thesis argues that reduced rivalry and increased economic interdependence between China and India in an age of economic globalization has contributed to the ability of Bangladesh taking advantage of both without falling into the strategic orbit of either power. However, if the rivalry between China and India intensifies, Bangladesh may have to make a clear choice of picking a side. The thesis also answers how will such intense rivalry, if it ever happens, affect Bangladesh's bargaining capacity of benefiting from both sides. Reviewing a correlative event of the past, the dissertation carefully applies Thucydides' interpretation of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta over Melos to understand Bangladesh's relations with India and China.

Research Question

How does Bangladesh benefit from both China and India without being completely aligned with either one?

Aims and Objectives

The principal objective of this dissertation is to understand (1) the strategic context of Bangladesh in South Asia, (2) to know how Bangladesh is being passively affected and developed by India and China's cooperation and competition, termed in this paper as 'balance of power' and finally (3) how the country benefits itself from the said balances of power.

Research Methodology

The dissertation purposefully applies a combination of two of the classic Social Sciences research techniques: qualitative and quantitative methods. Data used in the thesis mostly come in forms of words. However, there are numerical information, as well. Here quantitative statistics is used primarily to strengthen the qualitative argument. Many of the economic, social, and cultural resources used in the thesis are abstract, intangible, and difficult to quantify. Therefore, the qualitative approach gets a priority.

Moreover, the qualitative method is used here as a tool of interpretivism to synthesize large amounts of data derived from secondary sources. There are already sufficient data in the secondary sources for observation and content analysis. The method synthesizes these existing knowledge and identifies a pattern needed to answer the research question. It has positively situated the problem statement in the existing body of works many scholars have produced.

Therefore, this mixed-method appears to be mostly applicable to the central objective and suitable to create new knowledge and answer the research question never answered before.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The dissertation comparatively reviews various theoretical models to see why some of them do not have applicability, and then it argues why a particular theoretical framework is more suitable to answer the research question. It critically looks into significant amounts of literature to figure out how some of these frameworks lead to a limited understanding of small states. In doing so, the thesis begins with studying a chosen few International Relations theories, such as realism, neorealism, liberalism, neoliberalism, constructivism, and their distinctive approaches to small states, and importantly the theoretical gap or inapplicability they create in relation to the case of Bangladesh.

To go straight into the discussion, it recognizes how the traditional concept of vulnerability and capability dominates the study of small states, how the idea of vulnerability has evolved into opportunities over time, and how a vulnerable small state can still achieve competitive advantage from two powers competing over them (Thorhallsson, 2018).

Mainstreaming literature on small states significantly develops through western experiences. Especially after World War II, the Cold War era, and during decolonization movements, the proliferation of new nation-states added a lot to the existing literature (Long, 2017 and Browning, 2006). However, the fundamental concept remains the same. The concept of vulnerability and capability still dominates the scholarship. In that literature, security was perceived in terms of military and economic capacity (Baker Fox, 1959; Neumann & Gstohl, 2004). Therefore, small states join political and economic alliances or coalitions to survive (Keohane, 1969; Handel, 1981; Archer and Nugent, 2002). Unlike powerful states, small states cannot sustain on their own (Vital, 1967).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the new era of post-war liberation and globalization unprecedentedly disregarded the vulnerability and capacity based assumptions of small states. Nevertheless, none of these literature answers the research question. None of this literature explains how a small state benefits from two powers competing with each other over them. Systematically giving much attention to big states, mainstreaming International Relations theories have regularly underestimated the discourse of small states (Elman, 1995). However, it is not possible either discounting the mainstreaming literature due to their enormous scholarly contribution and wide application in the world. Many of them are not ‘entirely’ invalid. This thesis looks for the one that is more applicable than others.

Let us begin with liberalism. Liberals focus more on International Relations than on power politics between small states and large states. Cooperation between states, despite sizes and powers, is possible and can be maintained. In such a situation, democracy, trade, and institutions make such cooperation happen and sustain (Galal, 2020). States of all kinds broadly engage with each other in complex institutional, inter-state, and agreement-based relationships, which restrain powerful states from coercing small states. Liberalism views a state’s behavior as primarily driven by practical interests and ideological proximities between/among states (Keohane & Nye, 2011).

In contrast, Bangladesh’s asymmetric relationship with democratic India and communist China can not be explained through liberalism. None of these states are equal to each other in any regard. None of them share common values that bind them together. Bangladesh’s relation with China and India is not being maintained and sustained through liberal values (democracy, etc.). On the other hand, small European states joined the European Union, a liberal project, to balance German or Russian hegemony, among other reasons (Wivel, 2018). Their intention of transferring power to the EU institutions was an attempt to limit foreign influences on their national/internal affairs. Joining the European Union, these small states wanted their voices to be heard (Katzenstein, 2003). This European experience, however, does not apply to Bangladesh either. No South Asian regional organization has ever achieved the level of political and

economic integration the EU has achieved. Bangladesh has not exclusively joined any regional organization headed by either India or China or whatsoever. In fact, Bangladesh has welcomed both India and China to invest at the same time. It has neither remained neutral nor partisan. It has always been open to both. No organizations or institutions mediated for this complicated relationship. Such complexity is not explainable in liberalism. The possibility of applying liberal discourse is thus disregarded here.

Another theoretical framework that has also interpreted small states is neoliberalism. Immediately after the World Wars, institutions came to play their role to change the idea of the balance of power. Emerging within the broad spectrum of International Relations, the theory of neoliberalism highlights the role of local, regional, and international institutions that are supposed to enhance the capacity of a small state (Hildyard, 1998). The South Asian Associations of Regional Cooperation are among those neoliberal institutions. As one of the unique features of neoliberalism, the inequalities of small states were arguably addressed. Many small states were given the opportunity of enjoying statuses through their participation in those institutions. The further dissemination of International Organisations (IOs) and the evolutions of international laws have provided small states with more opportunities for representation. Despite equal status for small states, membership of these organizations also provides them with economic, military, and political security while effectively limiting the influences of powerful states through these international bodies and laws (Long, 2017). It is to note that Bangladesh has not achieved any statuses and representation through its participation in regional institutions that have facilitated its relations with China and India. Bilateral relations mostly contribute to what Bangladesh receives from both sides. Even after thorough reviews of a large amount of literature, Bangladesh's relation with China and India still seems complicated because of the conventional wisdom of typical International Relations historically biased of modern European roots and exclusive of postwar European experiences. The whole scenario is so complex that it asks for more scholarly investigation putting aside the practice of either/or dichotomy of mainstreaming International Relations theories.

Now it comes constructivism. After 1990, constructivism started interpreting the discipline. It brought a lot of innovative ideas. According to the constructivist approach, power is relative. The power of a state is an element best measured in reference to other states (Szalai). From a sociological point of understanding, constructivism is somehow called the relational theory that officially dates back to 1965. Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan established the theory. Even if having a vast territory, economy, and population, a state can still be relatively small compared to other states. The comparative measurement between China and India could be an example. Geographically, Bangladesh is approximately 498 times bigger than the Maldives and about four times bigger than Bhutan. India is around 22 times bigger than Bangladesh when China is three times bigger than India. The same goes for every aspect of a state.

Another new wave of constructivism later enriched the discipline, including Joseph Nye's soft power theory and Susan Strange's structural power, among others. Later, several theorists came up with new approaches regardless of the sizes and the opportunities of small states (Gomichon, 2013). They started to adopt constructivist frameworks to explain small states (de Carvalho and Neumann, 2015; Crandall and Varov, 2016; and Hedling and Brommesson, 2017). With much difference to liberalism and realism in a theoretical sense, constructivism develops more as a framework to explain small states by applying sets of ideas and understandings borrowed from several schools of thought. With agency and representation, it claims, states respond in several ways in line with their political values and identities and in response against values of other states (Wendt, 1992; Hopf, 1998). Constructivists also argue that small states' behavior changes according to their interests, identities, and values. They also argue that power is more important than material strengths.

Small states can pursue their objectives by using soft power and the art of persuasion (Nye, 1990; Ingebritsen, 2002; and Bjorkdahl, 2008). The entrepreneurial role of Scandinavian countries, for example, challenged the very definition of small states. Moreover, Ingebritsen (2002) demonstrates how ideational and identity factors have been a base of power for Scandinavian small states. Unique economic resources become an equalizer. Small states having

interest and ability to affect only a very narrow range of issues to a minimal degree is not necessarily a fact anymore (at least in the case of Scandinavia). In an asymmetrical approach, a small state can exercise influence as well. Allan Chong (2010) critically looked into possible benefits attached to small states. The role of mediation and attracting investors can virtually enlarge small states' capacity to a level where it does not matter to be a small state anymore. Scandinavia or Vatican City could be an example of such virtual enlargement.

This framework may answer the research questions partly. The realist part of constructivism may explain a bit. However, it is insufficient. The theory of constructivism does not make any difference. Bangladesh is still relatively small in regard to India and China in almost every possible consideration. The size and capacities still matter. Bangladesh may have some representations, but it does not improve the context in which it lives. Anyway, the representation is not the factor that is enabling India and China to pour large amounts of investments. Bangladesh is too small to influence China and India for its own national interests. It is just exploiting a context where India and China compete with each other to take control of Bangladesh. The argument of soft power, backed by the Scandinavian experiences, merely applies to Bangladesh. Bangladesh is neither a Scandinavian nation nor Vatican City with much entrepreneurial and cultural influences to virtually enlarge itself.

Following classical realism, another school of thought emerged. American theorist Kenneth Waltz coined it as neorealism. Like classical realism, this theory also tends to highlight the question of capacity to understand a small state. From the understanding, they end up arguing that a lack of resources means weakness. Founding the school of thought, Kenneth Waltz further argues that defining force as a balance of power in the international system is a powerful state. He argues that stability can only be maintained by a single hegemonic and bipolar order. Therefore, a small state's typical foreign policy objective is survival through building alliances (Pashakhanlou, 2009).

Small states compensate for their inbuilt weakness. Among others, limited resources, small populations, diplomatic capacities, and military strengths are considered here. Therefore, the prosperity of a small state depends on free trades, especially exports. Less competitiveness and underdeveloped infrastructures make their economy vulnerable to crises. Consequently, small states look up to other countries to fulfill what it lacks, such as the ability to deter conflicts with other states, have military and diplomatic support guaranteed, and grow its economy (Waltz, 2000).

In the face of threats, small states can also adopt neutrality and nonalignment. They mostly practice noninvolvement in hegemonic states' power politics, which is why small states do not take a side during rivalry. This tendency is nothing new. Neutrality existed during world wars, and it intensified even more during the cold war. However, the practice dates back to ancient Greece (Simpson, 2018).

It can be seen that the theory, as mentioned above, has emerged from the case study of the Cold War complex. South Asian regional powers, India and China, have never engaged in such a Cold War-style competition, precisely over Bangladesh. Unlike the common tendency of small European states, the rise of China and India has not pushed Bangladesh towards seeking any alliances of fellow small states in the region or looking for any shelter from any of them to counter another. Bangladesh has not lived the experiences of modern European small states. The discourse needs to be more inclusive, relevant, and localized in understanding the case of Bangladesh. This theoretical model still explains the research question better than previously discussed frameworks, but it does not agree with the neorealist suggestions/predictions that small states end up joining/building some alliances. So far, Bangladesh has not joined any alliance of any side against either India or China. Besides, Bangladesh has not remained neutral or non-aligned in the sense of non-cooperation. Bangladesh is neither neutral nor partisan. It has been friendly to both sides as frequently reiterated. The neorealist argument of a small state not taking sides during the rivalry between two competing powers fundamentally goes against the

research question's key argument. During times of intense rivalry, the dissertation argues, based on a historical event explained below, that small states choose one over another.

Finally, in the theoretical framework of realism, small states always seek powers to protect themselves (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). They end up relying on big states to run themselves. Small states without strategic importance lack the scope of influencing or bargaining and often depend on big powers' political and economic favors. International laws, agreements, and organizations, according to realism, take away powers from states. Powerful states, therefore, become self-motivated to engage in small states. Small states have very little to do with it. Because of not possessing enough military strength, diplomatic leverage, and economic might, small states are potentially subjected to be conquered (Vital, 1967). In this case, investment is the new age of conquest. This is how small states are one way or the other limited in the game of the realist world. However, this limitation also pushes small states in alternative ways. One of those many ways is cooperation (Waltz, 1979). In line with the theory, Bangladesh has always remained open to and cooperative with India and China.

Among realist, neorealist, liberal, neoliberal, and constructivist theoretical models, realism has been more relevant and consistent concerning the research question. Most of them have not maximally explained the case. Nevertheless, none of them is entirely irrelevant either. Some of them have been partially applicable.

Therefore, the dissertation adopted the realist theoretical framework addressing all the questions that other frameworks did not answer. Precisely, it will apply Thucydides' realism detailed in the History of the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides, often considered as the father of classical realism in International Relations, originally documented and analyzed political events that happened during the Peloponnesian War (Bagby, 1994). The framework still originates in Europe; however, ancient Greek experience is nothing like modern European small states' experiences to argue. Earlier, the dissertation equally puts efforts to explore Asian approaches to explain Bangladesh. Most of the Chinese theories of a state, either ancient or modern, advocate

centralization of many territories under a singular state governance of the economy, society, and culture. These political thoughts eventually led to the mass unification of various ancient kingdoms or chiefdoms into modern-day China (Yang, 2015). On the contrary, ancient Indian approaches to (small) states were based on decentralized governances in the forms of many monarchies, tribes, feuds, and classes until Britain colonized most of them into a unified India today. Asian approaches have not been relatable. Plus, many of these theories, rooted in ancient scriptures, myths, or texts, are neither reliably recorded nor unanimously agreed upon.

Given the fact of the quality and quantity of western literature of small states, it is unhelpful to disregard such a vast amount of scholarship. For example, Thucydides's writing of the history of the Peloponnesian War not only documented a battle for a certain period, but it indeed survived the test of time, drawing many similarities, which are useful to the understanding of contemporary small states. It is a precisely suitable tool to study how a small state achieves political goals from its powerful counterparts (Vitalis, 2012). For such timeless and placeless significance, Thucydides' theory of realism has been applied here.

The classic script of the Peloponnesian War, documented by Greek scholar Thucydides in his Melian Dialogue around 431 BC, is considered the founding text on small states literature (Boucher, 1998). It begins with looking into International Relations' one of the first case studies of small states, ancient Greece's island of Melos, and its relations with Athens and Sparta. The three decades of conflicts between Athens and Sparta in Ancient Greece provide some insights, which precisely explains the puzzle of Bangladesh maintaining relations with China and India in the 21st century South Asia. The dissertation freshly approaches Thucydides' analysis of the Peloponnesian War to discover parallels between Melos and Bangladesh, living in two different times and places yet sharing a lot of common grounds.

Finding such common grounds between Ancient Greece and contemporary South Asia, the dissertation takes history lessons not only about powerful states but, more importantly, about

small states in a competitive regional context where all the states— no matter big or small— actually seek to maximize how much they can achieve using whatever capacity they have.

The seminal work explains an epic battle between the two contesting Greek city-states at the time, Athens and Sparta, over the strategic control of a small island called Melos. The conflict began with Athens starting to use its maritime trade route to grow its economy, which alarmed its rival, Sparta. Eventually, Athens' economic growth caused tensions of conflicts with Sparta to the point that it polarised other states in the whole Greek peninsula, pushing Melos to choose one over another (Crawley, 2006). Athen's economic growth made Sparta insecure. Sparta felt compelled to restore the balance of power. In doing so, Sparta took a defensive maneuver to form an alliance called the Peloponnesian League against Athens' economic might and its counter-alliance, the Delian League (Crane, 1998). The emergence of regional alliances was to boost one nation's political ambition while countering the rise of its rival.

One small island did not join any of the alliances. As mentioned before, the island was called Melos. This tiny island, sandwiched between Athens and Sparta in the Aegean sea, chose to remain neutral to both sides. As a former Spartan colony, the people of Melos were ethnically and culturally Spartans. Following the independence from Sparta, however, Melos chose not to join any side. It remained non-involved in power politics. Melos practiced independence to the degree that it did not even take a side of ancestral Sparta and its alliance. This is the most ancient case of neutrality ever documented (Crane, 1998). For Melos, neutrality did not mean non-cooperation; it rather meant being open and cooperative to both sides.

However, Melos' neutrality did not appease Athens. The island's policies of being open to both sides did not work. Its neutrality might not directly pose a threat to Athens, but it did not help Athens either. Partly, because Melos was positioned in a geostrategically significant location. Being geographically closer to Sparta, the island was essential for Athens to run naval operations encircling Sparta in the Aegean sea. Melos was the closest, within range, and the only island closed to Sparta (MIT). Athens could reach the island within a day to harbor the Peloponnesian

fleet for rest and resupplies of fuels and foods. Without through Melos, Athens had to take a sailing route that appeared to be dangerous and of long-distance. In Ancient Greece, warships could only travel for a day. They needed to anchor somewhere in friendly or neutral ports every day. Anyway, Athenian ships could freely anchor on the island of Melos. In Ancient Greece, it was a universal norm for city-states to use friendly harbors for anchorage during the time of neutrality and even in time of war. As Melos was neutral, the ships of Athen's enemies could harbor there too. Athens did not want it. Athens wanted Melos to pick a side, decisively to take the side of Athens. Capturing Melos would reduce the chance of Athens' enemies to reach the island to use it as a naval base and anchor their warships (Cartwright, 2018). Athens targeted Melos because of the strategic role it was able to play as a harbor.

Athens started to question the neutrality of the island polis of Melos when they refused to join the Athens-led alliance called Delian League. Later, Athens planned a preemptive attack on Melos. In 416 BC, Athenian democracy voted to send representatives to Melos. Athenian emissaries demanded Melos to join the Delian League, pay tribute to Athens, and help them fight against Sparta. As none of the sides finally reached a deal, under Athens' leadership, the Delian League sent an army of 3,400 men in a total of 38 ships to conquer Melos (Joshi, 2018). Athenians did not waste time arguing over the morality and ethics of the situation. In practice, Athenians believed that might makes the right. Setting up camps on the Melian seashore, the Athenian delegation sent emissaries to negotiate with the rulers of Melos. The Athenian emissaries demanded a sense of pragmatism from Melians while reminding Melos of confirmed defeat at the hands of an overwhelming Athenian military. Athens offered Melos two choices of either to surrender or to face slaughter. Melos' rulers claimed they were a no-aligned, neutral, and peaceful island that did not pose any threats to anyone. Athens did not need to conquer them; they appealed. Melians requested Athens for decency and respect. Conserving independence for 700 years, the patriotic Melians refused to give up (Waelchli and Shah). The rulers of Melos argued that it would be cowardly to submit the island without a fight. They agreed that Athens was far stronger, but they also believed that there was a slim chance of winning. So, Melians wanted to try their luck rather than regretting not trying their best.

Athens thought it was not cowardly for Melos to submit to a superior power when Athens offered reasonable terms in return. Athenians did not want bloodsheds of an enemy that had only a chance of losing. It just wanted Melos to submit to Athens. Athenians labeled the Melos' argument of resistance as impractical and emotional. Athens warned that if Melos lost, as highly likely, it would regret its utopian optimism and void hopes. Finally, Melos began resistance in self-defense. In the face of Melian resistance, Athens sent reinforcement forces that ultimately collapsed the Melian regime. The Athenian army outmatched Melian forces. Athens defeated Melos in 416 BC. Eventually, Melos lost everything. (Robinson, 2017).

Athens captured Melos, slaughtered its men, and enslaved its children and women. Later Athens sent colonists to repopulate the island (Waelchli and Shah). No one came in defense of Melos. Even Sparta did not come to rescue Melos, as it did not join the Sparta-led Peloponnesian League. A negotiation took place after the defeat. In the negotiation, Athens argued that Melos could benefit itself by submitting before suffering the war, but Melos reaffirmed that Athens could believe in its neutrality of not taking sides with either one and being cooperative to both sides (Simpson, 2018). According to Athens, Melos behaved unrealistic, putting its people in unnecessary risks of war while its national interests were not at stake. Melos' poor understanding of realism shocked Athens. In the end, Melos realized the political mistake, but then it was too late.

Here's the dilemma that Melos's neutrality did not help Athens. Not helping Athens somehow benefited Sparta. Meanwhile, Athens had successfully taken over most of Ancient Greece. The balance of power between Athens and Sparta fell. The region became polarized. At the height of such polarization, Athens adopted a political calculus announcing that city-states not aligning with them was against them. The war fundamentally altered the balance.

During peacetime or balance of power, neutrality was acceptable. Being open to both sides was the norm. In fact, Melos maintained trading partnerships with both Athens and Sparta prior to the

conflict. It improved its economy from the help of both sides. When the rivalry began, Melos could no longer benefit from both sides without aligning with either one. The polarization of the peninsula pushed Melos to choose a friend over an enemy. It also ended Melos having trading relations with both at the same time (Lebow, 2011).

Melos' fate was deeply rooted in the nature of its statehood and the context it lived in, meaning its ability and location made Melos pay the price for the power rivalry of Athens and Sparta. The Athenian preemptive strategy of eliminating potential threats led Thucydides to conclude that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must (Warner, 1954). Based on Thucydides' narrative, realist scholars argue that international affairs are mostly power politics between sovereign states (Wight, 1978). In such power politics, small states sometimes remain neutral and sometimes align. They cannot be eternally neutral.

The timeless analogy of Melos applies to the context of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is currently open to both China and India, as Melos was once open to Athens and Sparta. At this moment, Bangladesh is benefiting from both. It is receiving competitive aids, grants, and investments from both. It is possible because the rivalry between China and India is still manageable. Bangladesh is taking advantage of a peacetime situation. Currently, Bangladesh remains in a prewar stage. Once the balance between India and China falls, Bangladesh will have to pick a side and stand by whoever guarantees protections and prosperities.

Much like Sparta, India is an establishment that seeks to maintain the status quo in South Asia, while China, as an emerging Athens, plays the role of a revisionist power. China and India may not officially form Peloponessian/Delian leagues against each other, but they have actively engaged in polarizing the whole of South Asia. Their competition over the control of Bangladesh is relatable to the pattern that existed in Ancient Greece. The rivalry has not yet reached the level of Sparta and Athens, but both of them are engaged in somewhere between intense competitions to moderate conflicts. They are still not so intense. The competition is still manageable. At this

moment, Bangladesh is engaged with both. Politically, it is more connected to India and economically to China. It has balanced the powers one way or the other.

Bangladesh's prospect of benefiting from both does not depend on itself. It depends on the balance of power. It relies on the individual state of India and China. Neutrality and alignment are both contextual. If the balance falls, the dissertation observes Bangladesh will align with whoever wins and safeguards its political interests.

Thucydides did not approve of utopian idealism advocated by Melos (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018). He concludes that morality has very little to do with inter-state affairs.

The history of the Peloponnesian War signified Athens and Sparta more than Melos. Mainstreaming literature systematically disregarded Melos. They were exclusively Athens and Sparta-centric. It was challenging to filter out piles of literature just to find out the perspective of Melos. Similarly, the dissertation puts a lot of effort into writing it from Bangladesh's perspective.

Chapter III

China and India's Strategic competitions over Bangladesh

Bangladesh's geographical location in the contested Indian ocean is pivotal. Emerging as one of the world's fastest-growing economies and having a domestic market of 160 million populations, it has become an equalizer in maintaining relations with China and India (Anwar, 2019). The size of the market economy and the size of the population overshadow the size of its territory. It is quite the reason Bangladesh is increasingly becoming a strategic hotspot between two competing locals, India and China.

China and India are economic rivals, even though they turn out to be investing in each others' countries. They are predicted to be the world's two biggest economies by 2050 (Ballard, 2018). While China is already the second-biggest economy (US\$ 14.14 trillion), India is the fifth (US\$ 3.2 trillion) in the ranking at this moment (Ballard, 2018). Furthermore, India is on its mission to progress and become the third-largest economy by 2028 (Ballard, 2018). None of their economic milestones will either be achieved in the vacuum of domestic development or through exclusive relations with the first world. For their developments, India needs Bangladesh, so does China.

Realizing such strategic advantages, Bangladesh has historically maintained fairness in its foreign policy towards both (Uddin, 2019). To build Sonar Bangla, literally meaning Golden Bangla, promised during its independence, Bangladesh pursues a balanced foreign policy upholding its famous statement, Friendship to All, Malice to None, as written in the constitution (Aktar, 2017). Bangladesh's significance in the calculations of China and India is not only perceived through geostrategy; it can be truly realized through the country's fastest-growing economy. By 2024 Bangladesh is expected to become a developing nation (Hossain, 2018). To become a middle-income state by 2021 and a developed country by 2041 as statistically indicted, Bangladesh equally needs Chinese (as well as Indian) investments (Karim, 2016). Just as much as Bangladesh needs Chinese and Indian investments, both countries also see their investments

as gateways to extend influences over Bangladesh. Dhaka just seizes these opportunities and uses them to fulfill its Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) deficit (Anwar, 2019).

Neither China nor India can directly block Bangladesh benefiting from both. China and India's bilateral interdependence has created a balance allowing Bangladesh this privilege. On top of that, economic cooperation between Beijing and New Delhi has increased over recent times. Not only Bangladesh, but India receives Chinese investments too. Therefore, New Delhi is not in a position to react against China's involvement in Bangladesh (Karim, 2016). The same applies to China. Despite bilateral disputes, they have continued investments in each others' countries. Mutual investments have managed their rivalry that eventually goes in favor of Bangladesh (Kabir, 2015).

Some political pundits believe that Bangladesh inching closer to either India or China does not matter as long as Dhaka does not leave either one, and the mutual cooperation between India and China continues (Kabir, 2015).

India is privileged to have history on its side. As a civilization in South Asia, India enjoys a kind of soft power source in Bangladesh that China will probably never have. Historically, there is sufficient depth and density of people-to-people connectivity between Indians and Bangladeshis for India to play soft power with ease (Prasai, 2019). Being surrounded on three sides and as a next-door neighbor, Bangladesh successfully engaged India when it needed the most, in its struggle to become an independent state back in 1971 (Uddin, 2019). India played a vital role in Bangladesh's independence and welcomed a large exodus of refugees during and after the liberation war. This particular event from the last century has dominated Bangladesh's ties with India ever since (Aktar, 2017).

However, following independence, Bangladesh has not ended up relying too much on India. It also reached out to China and kept it as a significant investor as of today (Uddin, 2019). Regime change (Bangladesh going from democracy to autocracy) was a reason, but its economic need

was the main motivation. Chinese influence in Bangladesh, in the backyard of Indian neighborhood, was relatively new by then, but it had grown since (Hossain, 2018). Bangladesh's relation with India has seen a lot of ups and downs (explained later), while its relations with China have only strengthened. It took a while for China to engage in Bangladesh, mostly because of the fact that China opposed Bangladesh's independence. It has this unassailable disadvantage of denying Bangladesh's independence and other key freedom struggles of the early seventies (Hussain, 2019). However, Bangladesh became independent on December 16, 1971. The People's Republic of China finally recognized and established diplomatic channels on October 4, 1975, nearly four years after Bangladesh achieved its statehood. Later celebrating the 30th anniversary of the bilateral relations, both declared the year 2005 as the year of Sino-Bangla friendship. Five years later, in 2010, two nations made a joint statement promising to build a "Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation." Again in 2014, Beijing and Dhaka committed to expanding the partnership of cooperation. So, two years later, in 2016, both signed another joint statement to upgrade the existing partnership into "Strategic Partnership of Cooperation" (Karim, 2016). China introducing all these policies in Bangladesh, had purposes. From disintegrating India's territorial integration, claiming lands from India, containing India in its very neighborhood to erasing its influences from Bangladesh, have been the persistent strategic goal of China in South Asia. This Chinese tendency is as historical as contemporary. To contain India's growing influences in its neighborhood, China implements the so-called String of Pearls in its political and military capacities among countries that surround India. Bangladesh has increasingly been involved in the pearls of Chinese investments, especially in forms of infrastructure developments (Ballard, 2018). Most of these Chinese investments have been received in bridges, highways, power plants, and whatnot.

Behind China's success in Bangladesh is its policy. The key feature of one of these Chinese policies is noninterference. China backs whatever regime comes to power (either democratic or autocratic) and avoids intervening in its national affairs. In doing so, the only purpose China serves is protecting its economic interests (Singh, 2019). It helps China in other ways too. Public sentiments in Bangladesh is one of them. Chinese investments are typically considered less

sensitive than India's political interferences (Bodetti, 2019). India's hegemonic posture towards Bangladesh has created occasional outrages among ordinary Bangladeshis and politicians alike (Anwar, 2019). Mass people of Bangladesh popularly view Indo-Bangla relations as non-reciprocal. Over the years, these feelings have only intensified. Bangladesh being sold out to India is a popular anxiety that runs deep through Bangladeshi political consciousness (Hossain, 2018). On the contrary, Chinese foreign policy in Bangladesh is systematically more resourced than that of India's. India has disadvantages as much as it has privileges. Misadventure of India's interference in Bangladesh's internal affairs often creates controversies. They are unnecessary, and they do not help India either.

Such a degree of consolidation of Sino-Bangla relations seemingly sends a concerning message to India. One of the critical challenges for India moving forward with Bangladesh is China. China has left India with almost no spaces to invest. India sees Chinese investments in Bangladesh as threats to its national security. However, the only realistic option available for India is to invest in Bangladesh as much as possible to counter growing Chinese economic influences (Bodetti, 2019).

The fears of Chinese encirclement finally led India to implement projects and initiatives in Bangladesh. As Sino-Indian competition intensifies over the years, Bangladesh is becoming a key battleground for India introducing many counter-Chinese policies such as 'Neighborhood First,' Act East, and so on (Hossain, 2018). In 2014 India adopted a Neighborhood First policy to consolidate its neighbor, especially Bangladesh (Ballard, 2018). Experts believe Neighborhood First policy is one of India's many efforts to change its image of a hegemony and to engage with Bangladesh as an equal partner (Kabir, 2015). Extending on decade-old Look East policy and Act East policy, India adopted this policy to improve India's diplomatic ties with neighboring Bangladesh. India implements Act East policy side-by-side with the Neighbourhood First policy, giving priority to immediate neighbors and realizing that its economic growth is related (to Bangladesh's development) (Ballard, 2018). These policies are believed to improve relations in

the areas of energy, connectivity, geostrategy, economy, and culture. It plans to make Bangladesh a centerpiece of these policies.

As a small state, Bangladesh struggles. The ability of balancing both is not something that is in control of Dhaka. Its national interests are often caught up in China and India's priorities, at least towards regional approaches. Bangladesh can do very little about them. China wants Bangladesh to engage in inter-regional connectivity, while India emphasizes sub-regional integration. For example, China wants (Bangladesh) to move closer towards China to engage beyond South Asia, while India wants it moving closer to each other within South Asia. India focuses on the neighborhood policy to integrate the region from within. In reality, the region has never been really integrated to a degree of measurable success. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation becomes a total failure. As less as only 5% of SAARC trade is intra-regional and investment within the region is less than 1% (Singh, 2019). Meanwhile, many other India's plans for integrating South Asia have not seen the face of success. Therefore, Bangladesh became interested in the South-Southeast Asia-related initiatives, instead of being engaged too much in India's neighborhood platform (Hussain, 2019). Bangladesh sees more economic opportunities in Southeast Asia than India's South Asia. This behavior of Bangladesh bears a witness to China's rise in South Asia and, with such rise, how India is losing its strategic space to China (Pant, 2010). China's peaceful rise as a global power comes with massive engagements in Bangladesh, giving a new dynamic to its relations with India. How much competitive advantages Bangladesh can achieve depends on how creative it is in dealing with China and India (Rahman, 2014).

Bangladesh is also aware of the fact that both China and India will ultimately be self-serving (Hossain, 2018). Dhaka carefully acts in its best capacity to avoid being a passive victim of geopolitical competition between them (Anwar, 2019). Getting the most out of Chinese and Indian competitions for Dhaka means to show no preferences between the two hegemons (Hossain, 2018). There is no guarantee for how long Bangladesh will continue to benefit from or how long the competition between them will go on (Hossain, 2018). Being stuck in a tug of war between India and China will only worsen Bangladesh's struggle, a country that is already

plagued by underdevelopment, fragile democracy, and other traditional and human security issues (Ballard, 2018). The practice of classical realism within Bangladesh's foreign policy understands what unprecedented consequences it may face if things go otherwise (Hossain, 2018). Based on one of the key arguments from the literature review, if any scale of conflicts emerges between India and China to the point of militarized hostilities or at least all-out non-cooperation, either one of them will double down on their efforts to bring strategically significant Bangladesh into their own orbit, meaning (Anwar, 2019), Bangladesh will be forced to prefer one over the another while losing all the competitive advantages it enjoys now (Hossain, 2018). So nothing is really guaranteed. Bangladesh has the possibility of continuing to win from the competition as much as it has the same possibility of losing for conflicts between them. India and China cooperate as much as they compete with each other. They share bittersweet stories. They engaged in wars. Then they found peace. They share business. They still have many unresolved disputes. The only thing that has persisted above everything else is their constant seeking to beat each other, either through winning one over another or one owning another (Ballard, 2018). However, there is not a cold-war style animosity yet. Some sorts of competitive coexistence restrain India and China from conflicts that enable Bangladesh to benefit (Singh, 2019). Until now, Bangladesh seems not to be a passive victim of their geopolitical competitions. It seems that Bangladesh will continue to use the balance of power in its own advantage (Xavier, 2017).

Chapter IV

Bangladesh's Bilateral Relations with India

Nearly five decades ago, Bangladesh became an independent state. Before, it mostly belonged to India in history. For this apparent reason, both of the countries share languages, customs, traditions, values (secularism and democracy), and so much of every facet of heritages. Likewise, India was the first country to recognize independent Bangladesh and established diplomatic ties after its active participation in Bangladesh's liberation war. The relationship is built based on respect for sovereignty, equality, and trust (MEA, 2017). Therefore, many tend to say that Bangladesh's historical and fraternal partnership ties with India are organic and go beyond a few billions of dollars of trade and investments. To keep such bondage alive and more, Bangladesh maintains a sustainable understanding and connections with India (NDTV, 2019). Likewise, India also strengthens its ties with Bangladesh. For India, Bangladesh is geostrategically as important as shared heritage (Arshad, 2020).

Being situated between the Indian mainland and its unstable Northeastern region with access to the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh has become a place of greatest strategic interest for India. Indian mainland and periphery are divided by a small corridor. To reach out to its seven Northeastern states, together called Seven Sisters, India uses that small corridor sandwiched between Bangladesh and Nepal that is threateningly close to China's strategic reach (MEA, 2017). The corridor, too narrow to be called Chicken's Neck, is only 200 km long, 60 km wide, and only 27 km away from China. India and China are currently engaged in a face-off near the corridor, called Doklam Plateau (Gurung, 2018). In a potential war with China, the whole Northeastern region is at risk of being separated. India has no other choice rather than using a direct transit route through Bangladesh to connect these Northeastern states (MEA, 2017). It is pretty much the reason behind Indian using a transit route across the Bangladeshi territories to connect its isolated peripheral states.

As much as Bangladesh separated India's mainland and its seven peripheral states, India also surrounds Bangladesh from three sides for the same reality. Being surrounded by India on the east, west, and north along the 4025 kilometers of borders, the relation with India remains the priority of foreign policy for Bangladesh (MEA, 2017). So, the unique geostrategic location provides Bangladesh with opportunities as well as obstacles. This part of the thesis explores them. It studies long-pending disputes and recent trends in the relationship. It analyzes how far they have come and recognized challenges that still hold them back.

I. Major Events in Bangladesh's Relations with India

Over time, the traditional relationship graduates to the next level of engagements and cooperations. High-level official visits and diplomatic exchanges work as catalysts (MEA, 2017). The dissertation focuses on recent trends of those relations. Below are some critical high-level ministerial visits and exchanges at senior levels that gave the relationship a fresh start.

1. In March 2013, former Indian Prime Minister Pranab Mukherjee visited Bangladesh on his very first trip abroad.
2. In June 2014, India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj paid her first standalone foreign visit to Bangladesh after being sworn in power.
3. In December 2014, Bangladesh's President Abdul Hamid visited India for the first time after 42 years as a ceremonial head of state.
4. In June 2015, Indian Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh. He concluded 22 bilateral documents. Bangladesh convinced India to ratify the historic India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement and received India's US\$ 2 billion investments.
5. A year later, in 2016, the Bangladeshi premier also visited India.
6. In April 2017, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina revisited India. About 36 bilateral documents were concluded. They include agreements in areas of nuclear energy,

space, defense, information technology, and other capacity-building initiatives. Bangladesh managed to get US\$ 4.5 billion from India in the areas mentioned above.

7. In October 2019, Bangladesh's Prime Minister visited India to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. During the occasion, both of the Prime Ministers inaugurated four bilateral projects. They include (1) supply of Indian vehicles such as 500 trucks, 300 double-decker buses, and 200 Air-Conditioned buses under the second Line of Credit, (2) extending India's National Knowledge Network to Bangladesh, (3) building 36 clinics in five districts and (4) building 11 water treatment plants (MEA, 2020).

Gujral Doctrine influenced India resolving many of the bilateral disputes with Bangladesh. India's Prime Minister I. K. Gujral from the 1990s came up with this doctrine. He suggested that India should be proactive in resolving all the outstanding issues with its neighboring states, including Bangladesh. India would not expect anything in return, but it would be able to provide what it can in good faith (Karim, 2009). It worked pretty well as Bangladesh and India have solved many of the pressing issues.

II. Institutionalization of the Bilateral Relations

Over 50 bilateral institutional mechanisms, jointly established by Bangladesh and India, function to strengthen the ties. These institutions approach a wide range of mutual interests. Recently the areas such as space, nuclear energy, security, water sharing and marine affairs, power and energy, science and technology, trade and investments, connectivity and transports, and culture exchanges receive higher priority. A Joint Consultative Commission, formed by Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Affairs Ministry of India, coordinates and oversees the implementations of initiatives undertaken by these bilateral institutions. Both of the nations under these institutions explore fresh avenues for cooperation. So the bilateral areas of interest are not limited as they are continually being explored. So far, they organized five consultative meetings with the latest one being held in February 2019 in New Delhi, India (MEA, 2017).

III. Trade and Investments

Shortly after independence, Bangladesh reached a trade agreement with India in 1972. Long after, in 2015, it was reviewed for five years, with a provision of automatic renewal for the next time. Several other agreements are signed in the subsequent years as well. Following the agreement, bilateral trade grew over the recent past. In five years alone, the inter-state trade has grown by more than 17%. During the fiscal year 2016-17, Bangladesh's exports to India were US\$ 672.40 million (MEA, 2017). It increases to US\$ 873.27 million. Finally, it reached a record of US\$ 1.25 billion marks in the 2019-2020 fiscal year, with 52% increases from the last years. Bilateral trade increased up to US\$ 9.5 billion in 2017-18 (Ahmed, 2019).

Removal of duties imposed on goods worked as a catalyst behind this economic growth. Bangladesh reached a bilateral Comprehensive Partnership Agreement with India's latest in 2019. India promises to withdraw, or at least relax, duties imposed on their imports from commodities (PM India, 2019). Bangladesh is also currently receiving duty-free access to the Indian market under the South Asian Free Trade Area since 2011, meaning, now, Dhaka can export to India as a stock market for free.

Bangladesh also received US\$ 88 million as Foreign Direct Investment from India in FY 2015-16. Later in 2017, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister visited India and signed 13 agreements worth a record of US\$ 10 billion investments in the power and energy sectors (MEA, 2017).

Officials at ministerial levels were dedicated to research and establish a framework of cooperation in Trade Remedial measures and capacity building (PM India, 2019).

One Memorandum of Understanding between the Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution and the Bureau of Indian Standards was renewed to integrate bilateral trades (PM India, 2019).

There are many community-oriented trade policies, as well. "Border Haat (Market)" is among them. This trade policy directly benefits people on both sides living by the borders (MEA, 2017).

Taking lessons from the success of Border Markets for people living there, at least 12 more border bazaars are planned to be open (PM India, 2019).

As a result of all these economic policies, Bangladesh has recently progressed out of its LDC status. The Committee for Development Policy found that Bangladesh has met the criteria for the first time. CDP will officially recommend the graduation of Bangladesh from LDC status in 2024. The possibility of growing more has also graduated with it (PM India, 2019).

Bangladesh remains India's biggest trading partner in the region. However, none of these ignore the fact that there is still a considerable trade gap (Ahmed, 2019). It is an opposite situation where Bangladesh does not feel a win-win in dealing with India. India's economy is too big for Bangladesh to compete with. In 2017, India exported US\$304.1 billion worth of commodities and services, when it was US\$ 35.3 billion exports for Bangladesh. Again, Bangladesh imported US\$47.56 billion in 2017 against India importing US\$ 452.2 billion in the same. It shows a similar picture of the economies of both countries (Karim, 2009).

IV. India's Economic Assistance

Indian investments in Dhaka benefit Bangladesh as much as they do India. Sharing common economic infrastructures is mainly the reason.

Over the past seven years, Bangladesh received 3 Lines of Credits totaling US\$ 8 billion as the largest recipient of India's funds ever pledged to a country until today (MEA, 2017).

In January 2010, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister visited India and received US\$ 1 billion LoC in transports, railways, roads, bridges, and inland waterways. Many of these projects are already completed. The rest are underway. Later in June 2015, Bangladesh invited the Indian Prime Minister to Dhaka, and then he pledged another US\$ 2 billion LoC. It funded 15 projects such as power, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), shipping, health, and medical care, technical education, including those mentioned above. Again in April 2017, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister visited

India and received a third LoC of US\$ 4.5 billion. This time most of this LoC will be spent in building infrastructures such as ports, power, and energy, telecommunications, and shipping industries. (MEA, 2017).

Bangladesh engaged India in many High Impact Community Development Projects taking socio-economic development to Bangladesh's grassroots level. Both countries inaugurated three bilateral development partnership projects on October 5, 2019. They include-

- (1) the agreement of Bangladesh exploring BULK Liquefied Petroleum Gas to India,
- (2) building a student hostel called Vivekananda Bhaban at Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka,
- (3) inaugurating Bangladesh-India Professional Skill Development Institute at the Institution of Diploma Engineering Bangladesh, Khulna (PM India, 2019).

Besides, Bangladesh also receives 'Aid to Bangladesh' assistance from India. This aid programs finance building academia, hospitals, clinics, research labs, and community/cultural centers. There are Sustainable Development Projects (SDPs) that are building communities in different parts of the country, including Rajshahi, Khulna, and Sylhet (MEA, 2017).

Small Development Projects are India's strategies for promoting public diplomacy at the grassroots in Bangladesh. India currently funds 55 such projects that include building academic buildings, student hostels, cultural centers, orphanages, and so on. Another 26 projects of this kind are being implemented at this moment (MEA, 2020).

They also agreed to increase exchanges of capacity-building training for each others' civil servants. Human resource development is a fundamental element of India's cooperation strategies. These are training programs and scholarship programs for both military and civilian professionals. India's National Centre for Good Governance has been training at least 1800

Bangladesh Civil Service officials since 2019. Bangladeshi police personnel also receive various training opportunities from India's premier institutions. At least 1500 Bangladeshi judicial officials have been receiving training since 2017 at several India's state-run academies, including National Judicial Academy. Moreover, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations awards 200 scholarships to Bangladeshi students at graduate, postgraduate, and M.Phil/Ph.D. levels (MEA, 2020).

V. Energy Cooperation

Both of the countries are more integrated than ever before in terms of energy exchanges. Bangladesh and India strengthened and consolidated their energy cooperation over the past few years. The cooperation reached to strategic partnership.

The bilateral partnerships agree to undertake a few projects as detailed below (Bhardwaj, 2019) (MEA, 2017).

1. In 2010, Dhaka and New Delhi signed a landmark agreement. The agreement came in effect three years later. From 2013, Bangladesh is receiving a supply of 500 MW from Bheramara-Bahrampur interconnection. In 2018, India agreed to export 500 MW more power from the same interconnection. Later another 160 MW was added from Tripura-Comilla interconnections. Currently Bangladesh's power imports from India have increased to 1160 MW in total.
2. The partnership extends to renewable fields as well. In November 2017, New Delhi and Dhaka have started cooperating on nuclear and renewable energy. Bangladesh officially entered the nuclear energy era with the agreement of building a 2400 MW Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant. The power plant is India's first-ever nuclear venture (ANI, 2019).
3. Dhaka and New Delhi reached a joint partnership of establishing the Maitre Super Thermal Power project in Bagerhat. The coal-based plant will produce 660 MW power. Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Plant Company Ltd will jointly run the plant.

4. Bangladesh signed and ratified Framework Agreement on International Solar Alliance, proposed by India. In 2018, Dhaka also attended the founding conference called Solar Summit in New Delhi. A proposed solar power plant in Khulna will produce approximately 180 MW renewable energy.
5. In April 2017, both countries announced several projects to be built. A Line of Credit totaling US\$ 4.5 billion was pledged. Eventually US\$ 9 billion will go to the energy sectors.
6. India's private sectors also stepped up in this energy sector. Adani and Reliance Group signed a deal of supplying electricity to Bangladesh in 2019. They agreed to produce 225 MW in Bhola.
7. An integrated gas-based power plant was agreed in Meghnaghat near Dhaka. The combined cycle gas plant will reportedly produce 3,000 MW. India's Reliance Group is engaged in the project. Bangladesh Power Development Board signed a long term power purchase agreement to access energy from the plant.
8. India and Bangladesh signed a cooperation agreement in the hydrocarbon sector. Indian Oil Corporation Ltd will implement a network of internal power supply in Bangladesh.

The agreement also explores other areas of cooperation, notably in High Speed Diesel supplies, Liquefied Petroleum Gas, Transboundary Pipelines and Natural Gas. Over 130 kilometers of oil pipeline is being implemented to transport diesel from India's West Bengal to Parbatipur in Northern Bangladesh.

In addition, Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation will receive Liquefied Natural Gas from Numaligarh Refineries Ltd as transported through train.

9. India imports Bangladesh's bulk Liquefied Petroleum Gas to its peripheral states in the Northeast. Bangladesh exports them via its strategic energy routes to those states boosting cross-border energy trades. Both sides also reached a deal of developing a

765kV Double Circuit cross-border electricity interconnection between Bangladesh's Parbotipur and India's Katihar and Bornagar (PM India, 2019).

10. Another 70 kilometers of pipeline will be built between India's Duttapulia to Khulna in Bangladesh transporting natural gas for an agreement of 15 years.
11. Finally, both countries signed an agreement to come up with an institutional framework mechanism to continue cooperation in Bangladesh's hydrocarbon sectors, including 15 trillion cubic feet gas reserves in Bangladesh.

The cooperation continues to progress. Bangladesh inviting Indian companies alongside their government has been a major success for such cooperation.

VI. Defense Cooperation

Both countries recognize the necessity of defense cooperation. They want to begin fresh upgrading it from the ineffectual Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Peace often referred to as a defense pact, signed in 1972. The upgrade came with adding a dimension to the security cooperation. Maritime security partnership among the major areas that drew the attention of both. A Memorandum of Understanding on Establishment of Coastal Surveillance Radar System was finalized in 2019. Bangladesh received India's US\$ 500 Line of Credit for defense infrastructures through a deal signed in the same year (PM India, 2019). Under the Line of Credit, Bangladesh purchases military hardware such as radar, patrol craft for coastguards, among others (Karim, 2017).

Earlier in 2017, India proposed a long term defense pact with Bangladesh. It was as long as 25 years. Bangladesh was uneasy, particularly giving away everything India wanted when several issues remained unresolved.

The defense pact would require coordinated military operations against common threats and exclusively buying arms and receiving training from India. Bangladesh declined straight away. However, a discussion still goes on. Instead of a long-term defense pact, Bangladesh is interested in a flexible Memorandum of Understanding with no formal binding and time frame. Not having any serious and comprehensive defense agreement with India allows Bangladesh to explore beyond India. Hence Bangladesh includes other countries, rather than relying on single-source supply. In response to India's constant pushes for defense deals, Bangladesh is still reluctant and declines it into an MoU. Bangladesh also has similar MoUs with other countries. It has never been in a long term defense pact with any nations (Karim, 2017).

VII. Connectivity and Integration

Both sides recognize that increasing connectivities through lands, waters, and the air is key to economic integration. At this moment, Bangladesh reaches India through all channels of connections and transportations. The movements of people and products are more integrated than ever before. Around 36 Land Customs Stations (LCSs) and 2 Integrated Check Posts operate. Nonstop Benapole land port is a major one, where approximately 50% of trade occurs (MEA, 2017).

At least four inter-state rail links currently operate. Two more railroads were agreed to build in April 2017 (MEA, 2017). Both countries increase the frequency of railway connections. One of the major railway express, the Maitree Express, runs about four times a week. Bandhan Express runs 1 to 2 per week. Both of the governments have recently planned to restore the old rail links that existed between Bangladesh and India before 1965. They agreed to increase the frequency of two passenger trains (Maitree and Bandhan Express) from 4 days a week to 5 days a week (MEA, 2020). Bangladesh also received broad-gauge and meter-gauge locomotives as grants from India (PM India, 2019).

There are regular bus services as well. The bus route was launched in April 2017 (MEA, 2017). In addition, both sides also plan to develop a bilateral India-Bangladesh Motor vehicles Agreements. Different bus routes were agreed to introduce (PM India, 2019). Recently, both of the countries agreed to introduce two new bus routes. They include Dhaka-Gangtok and Dhaka-Siliguri routes (MEA, 2020).

Connecting major cities, more than 100 flights are flying every week (MEA, 2017). They increased capacity in air services from the existing 61 flights per week to 91 flights per week. The service will be 120 flights per week from winter 2020 (PM India, 2019).

There are also protocols on Inland Water in effect since 1972. Under this protocol, the commodities are transhipped through eight waterways in the river systems (MEA, 2017). Two major river routes were also developed.

In June 2015, Coastal Shipping Agreement was signed to enable cargos carrying through seas. Later in 2017, more routes were introduced, including the Kolkata-Pangaon sea route (MEA, 2017).

Both countries concluded a Standard Operating Procedures for utilizing Bangladeshi ports in Chittagong and Mongla for the movements of products to and from India. The development of these ports will facilitate movements of cargoes using coastal and inland waters (PM India, 2019).

In addition, Bangladesh has offered India direct transit and transshipment routes to its Northeastern region, with minimum fees showing a friendly gesture (Ahmed, 2019).

India is used to accessing its Northeast region via the 22 kilometers-width Siliguri corridor, called Chicken's Neck. It is over 1600 km in the distance. The distance is reduced to only 600 km and just 200 km from nearby Bangladesh's Chittagong port through Bangladesh. Bangladesh transit contributes to the reduction of poverty in India's northeastern region (Kathuria, 2017).

VIII. Cultural and Academic Exchanges

Bangladesh engages the Indian Council for Cultural Relations for cultural exchange. The Indian High Commission, Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre, and Bangladesh' Modern Language Institute play significant roles in the exchange of cultures. All of these institutions organize a wide range of cultural activities. IGCC celebrates common cultural heritages between the nations. It also provides training programs. They mostly include yoga, dance (Manipuri etc.), classical music (Hindustani etc.), Kathak, among others (MEA, 2020). They publish periodicals, journals, and magazines. A popular monthly magazine named Bharat Bichitra has been publishing for four decades (MEA, 2017).

India and Bangladesh jointly held many historic cultural events involving both nations. Sesquicentennial Birth (150 years) Anniversary of India's Mahatma Gandhi in 2019, and Centennial Birth (100 years) Anniversary of Bangladesh's Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 2020 were among those major joint celebrations (due to Coronavirus Pandemic, the event was cut short). Bangladesh released a commemorative postal stamp celebrating Gandhi's birthday. The Golden Jubilee (50 years) of Bangladesh's liberation in 2021 is also planned to be held together, celebrating their joint efforts towards the independence of Bangladesh. Both nations increase their cultural interactions and bondage by celebrating shared historical events. They also renewed several other Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Exchanges Programs. Entertainment and films are one of those extended areas of cultural exchanges. Both nations agreed to produce films dedicated to Bangladesh's independence, its founding father, Bangabandhu, and India's key role (PM India, 2019).

The cultural exchange was extended to museums as well. A Memorandum of Understanding signed between India's National Museum and Bangabandhu Museum. Several other MoUs on Cultural Exchange Programs were renewed (PM India, 2019).

Both countries emphasized investing in youths and students as future assets. They signed a Memorandum of Understanding in cooperation in youth affairs. They prioritized structural training programs (PM India, 2019). Bangladesh engages India to train its officials and civilians. Civil and military officials, judiciary, scientists, and all other professionals receive this training. In addition, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations grants scholarships to Bangladeshi students every year (MEA, 2017). Briefly, a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Dhaka and the University of Hyderabad was signed. They also concluded another Memorandum of Understanding on Mutual Recognition of Academic Qualifications (PM India, 2019).

IX. Travel and Visa Process

Indian High Commission in Dhaka and two other consulates in Chittagong and Rajshahi undertake the visa application process. They receive applications from 12 centers in Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Jessore, and Barisal. Bangladesh receives more Indian visas than any other country. More than a million visas are being awarded to Bangladesh yearly (MEA, 2017). In 2019, Bangladesh received 1.5 million Indian visas. It is the record highest number of visas India has ever provided to any country in the world. The number continues to increase. In 2018, 1.46 million visas were awarded to Bangladesh, and in 2017, the number of visas was only 13.8 million. In previous years, more or less half a million people used to receive Indian visas (The Wire, 2019).

Both sides agree to simplify people-to-people movements at a massive level. As a part of the process, India simplifies the visa process. Most of the previous bans or complexities were lifted to help Bangladeshis travel by road, rail, and air. The remaining restrictions are promised to be removed in phases (PM India, 2019).

Bangladeshi tourists accounted for over 20% of the total number of foreigners who visited India in 2018. Moreover, it contributes to 50% of India's health tourism revenues. To facilitate the number of people visiting (MEA, 2017), Bangladesh has opened a few consulates across India. It

opened an office of the deputy High Commission of Bangladesh in Chennai, India's state of Tamil Nadu, where most Bangladeshis visit for medical purposes (PM India, 2019).

X. Insurgency

India's Northeastern region, popularly known as Seven Sisters surrounding the borders of Bangladesh, is historically troubled with insurgency and separatism. India accuses China of fueling militancy there. China often claims territories from these volatile states that may isolate them from India's mainland (Xavier, 2017). Approximately 175 insurgent groups secretly operate on and off. Many of these Indian insurgents use cross-border routes to hide into or operate from Bangladesh. Bangladeshi terrorist and organized criminal groups also supposedly hide in India's Seven Sisters. Both sides use each other's country as safe havens. It is an area that brings India and Bangladesh to initiate bilateral actions and cooperations (Karim, 2009).

Apart from economic reasons, India's motive for using direct transit routes across Bangladesh to Seven Sisters is to maintain stability and territorial integrity. The route through Bangladesh Reduces the distance. From India's West Bengal state to its Tripura state in the Northeast, the route cuts 1880 kilometers into only 740 kilometers if it goes straight across Bangladesh. The routes through Bangladesh helps India strategically locate its armed forces there in the greatest hour of need (Karim, 2009). Besides, Bangladesh is the only transit corridor to India's Northeastern states.

The extraction treaty with Bangladesh helped India to crack down on militancy. Bangladesh hands over insurgent leaders who run away and flee to Bangladesh. The United Liberation Front of Assam leaders were among those prominents that Bangladesh transferred to India (Ahmed, 2019).

As part of India's grand strategy, it plans to protect its national integrity and preserve regional influence, and Bangladesh is exactly providing with that. (Stratfor Worldview, 2019). Playing a

vital role in India's national security, the Bangladesh government helps New Delhi uproot separatist militancy in its volatile Northeast.

These transit routes benefit Bangladesh too, through transborder economic activities. Giving India what it wanted for so long, Bangladesh showed friendliness and created an environment where India was grateful enough to resolve many other issues such as progress in water sharing deals, lifting non-tariff barriers for Bangladeshi commodities entering Indian markets (Karim, 2009).

XI. Border Security

Bangladesh earns great appreciation from India for not allowing the terroristic use of its territory against India's territorial integrity. Bangladesh's policy of zero-tolerance against terrorism brings relative stability in the region. Both nations acknowledge that terrorism still remains a major threat and thus commit to eliminating its manifestation through any groups (extremists, jihadists, smugglers, and other organized criminal groups) (PM India, 2019).

Another burning issue is the mass killing of innocent civilians at borders. Border killing is among the key challenges that still hurt the relationship. The border is one of the world's most hostile ones. India's Shoot-to-kill policy murdered over 1,000 people in the last decade. Unofficial sources claim the number to be double (Human Rights Watch, 2011). In dealing with trans-border criminal activities and the bloodshed, both countries agreed to properly fence the border and ensure maximum restraints to bring the deaths of innocent civilians down to zero (PM India, 2019).

Earlier in 2011, Bangladesh negotiated a deal called the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) to facilitate the cooperation of border guards on two sides to address cross-border illegal activities and bloodshed at the borders (MEA, 2017). With the implementation of CBMP, the illegal transborder activities and bloodshed have dropped to the record low.

In 2019, a series of talks took place between Border Guard Bangladesh and India's Border Security Force at the Director-General level. They also organized border coordination conferences to discuss border management (MEA, 2020).

XII. Border Disputes

Bangladesh and India share about 4096.7 km of borders. It is the longest boundary each of them shares with their neighbors. Both nations share disputes as long as their borders as well. Most of these disputes continued for four decades. However, following the ratification in June 2015, the Bangladesh-India Land Boundary Agreement came into force. Next month in July 2015, the undecided enclaves were redistributed, and the new maps were redrawn with constitutional amendments (MEA, 2017). Out of all these disputed enclaves, India gets 51 enclaves covering 7110 acres of land, and Bangladesh receives 111 enclaves covering a total of 17169 acres of land. The historic agreement settled the citizenships of nearly 53000 stranded people living in those enclaves. They were given a chance to choose either Bangladesh or India's citizenship (Ahmed, 2019). Everyone stranded in those enclaves for decades was finally given liberation after liberation. The inhabitants left these enclaves and settled in either country in November 2015. With the implementation of the h Land Boundary Agreement, the un-demarcated border dispute is mostly settled (MEA, 2017).

Earlier in 2014, the settlement of maritime border arbitration, in line with the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea, finally opened the opportunities for Bangladesh to attract Indian investments in the Bay of Bengal (MEA, 2017).

XIII. Water Sharing Disputes

The bilateral friendship between Bangladesh and India has reached many milestones, but it does not mean that everything is smooth. Water sharing of common rivers among major setbacks that still hurt Bangladesh more than all it has achieved from India (Ballard, 2018).

One of the most persistent challenges of bilateral relations is water-sharing (Ahmed, 2019). Both countries share 54 common rivers, with Bangladesh being a lower riparian state. Bangladesh accuses India of denying water when it needs the most during the dry season and flooding with waters when it does not need it at all during the rainy seasons. Fair sharing of the water of these rivers is key to maintaining ecological balance and sustaining agrarian sectors. Bangladesh has a sizable agro-based economy that suffers the most. However, India equally needs water in many of its bordering states too. It is where the dilemma comes. These states are the ones that mainly oppose water sharing with Bangladesh. India's central government does not have a decisive influence on the provincial matters of these states. Even after India and Bangladesh put forward many efforts to reach deals, these states block them as de facto third parties on the table (Karim, 2009).

Among all the water disputes, the biggest bilateral dispute that currently exists is the Teesta Water Sharing. A treaty was already in place, but India's West Bengal refused to comply, causing the current standoff. India's regime in 2011 tried to reach an agreement with Bangladesh, but it could not do it due to the resistance from its provincial government. Later in 2015, another regime tried to conclude the same deal, but they failed again for the same reason. Later, both sides moved forward to an overall solution to the other 54 common rivers. Nothing significant came out so far (Ahmed, 2019).

An ineffective Joint River Commission, established in June 1972, maintains liaison between the countries to maximize mutual benefits. The commission has been regularly holding meetings ever since, but no concrete outcome resulted. There are separate treaties as well. The Ganges

Water Treaty was among others that were signed in 1996 for sharing water during the lean season, especially from the month of January to May (MEA, 2017). Moreover, Secretaries of Water Resources on both sides formed a Joint Technical Committee and Team of Reference to study the Ganges-Padma Barrage Project and ensure water to be received by both sides in line with Ganges Water Sharing Treaty of 1996. A Technical Level Committee for Joint Rivers Commission is directed to draft a framework for Interim Sharing Agreements for six rivers (Dudhkumar, Dharla, Khowai, Manu, Muhuri, and Gumti rivers). Bangladesh awaits the implementation of the Interim Agreement for water sharing of Teesta rivers as agreed in 2011. The Central government of India is currently negotiating its provinces (PM India, 2019). None of these treaties ever resolved anything.

XIV. Refugees Crisis

The Burmese military crackdown on ethnic Rohingyas in Rakhine state led an exodus of nearly a million of Rohingyas into Bangladesh, raising a tension of war (Bhaumik, 2017). Upon arrival, Bangladesh sheltered and provided humanitarian assistance to the refugees fleeing persecutions. As a neighboring state, India supplied the fifth tranche of humanitarian aid to the Bangladesh government. The tranche of assistance consists of tents, rescue materials, sewing machines for women, and other relief accessories (PM India, 2019). India implements a project of building 250 houses for refugees in the Rakhine state of Myanmar from where they have fled and prepares to implement another fresh socio-economic development in the areas (PM India, 2019).

Bangladesh convinces India to initiate diplomatic efforts to expedite safe, speedy, and sustainable repatriation of refugees to their homeland in Myanmar. Joint efforts were discussed for safe returns upon the guarantee of safety and socio-economic improvements of their life in Myanmar (PM India, 2019).

Bangladesh expected India to play a role in the crisis. India could arrange a tripartite meeting mediating India and Myanmar. As an initiator of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral

technical and Economic Corporations (BIMSTEC), India's role was due to maintain regional peace and stability (Bhuyan, 2017).

Bangladesh referred to its five-point plan to resolve the refugee crisis (Hindustan Times, 2017).

1. Myanmar must unconditionally stop the ethnic cleansing in its Rakhine state immediately and forever.
2. A fact-finding mission needs to be sent to Myanmar under the United Nations Secretary General
3. The protection of different ethnic and religious groups must be guaranteed with safe zones for the returns of refugees, under the United Nations supervisions.
4. Ensuring sustainable returns of all the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Bangladesh to Myanmar
5. Unconditional implementations of Kofi Annan Commission's recommendations

Other than announcing logistics support and some large amounts of dollars in donation, India has done very little when it comes to concrete actions it is supposed to play.

Many claim the Rohingya conflict has dimensions rooted in India's economic interests in Myanmar.

Amid massive expulsions of Rohingya, India backed Burmese military's operations of maintaining stability. Even New Delhi labels the operation against the minority as war against terrorism. Indian Prime Minister visited Myanmar in 2017. During the trip he did not recognize persecution of Rohingyas, rather offered development projects in Rakhine. China has already US\$ 7.3 billion construction projects in the state (Bose, 2018). Heavily invested in Rakhine, India technically ignores Rohingya issues for its economic purposes that are already being contested by China.

India not standing by Bangladesh on refugees against Myanmar is strategic, not accidental.

XV. Illegal Immigration

Illegal immigration is a burning issue in India with critical sociopolitical implications, especially fueling identity politics in India's unstable northeast. The issue seasonally trends. Particularly during elections, it receives political attention. Otherwise, it mostly remains the business of India's border guards and internal affairs of some provinces.

India has been consistent in accusing illegal Bangladeshi immigration pouring into its adjoining states to a level that it is changing the vote banks. It accuses that uncontrolled illegal immigration reshape ethnic demography, change religious and linguistic profile and threaten integrity causing hatreds, suspicions and fears (Pattanaik, 2014). Divisive Indian politicians label so-called immigration as demographic aggression. The Indian embassy in Dhaka claims that about 25,000 Bangladeshi do not return after entering India every year. The unrecorded number is much higher (Karim, 2009). According to hateful rhetoric, illegal Bangladeshis infiltrate India, marry Indians, convert them through love jihad and smuggle holy cows. These popular narratives and propaganda fueled anti-Bangladesh sentiments, which eventually gave rise to gun violence at the borders and push-back policy creating bilateral tensions (Chatterjee, 2017).

The National Register of Citizens was an issue that took the bilateral relation straight to the standoffs. Recently NRC declared that 1.9 million people in India as illegal immigrants and indicated they were of mostly Bangladeshi origins. However, Bangladesh officially denies it. Soon after India passed this Citizenship Act in 2019, the law stirred up controversies in Bangladesh. Many groups label the law as communal and divisive. It targets and denies Muslim minorities, living in India since their birth, of Indian citizenship while allowing non-Muslims of other countries the right of settlement in India. Immediately nearly two million minorities, born and raised in India for decades, became stateless. Among so-called illegal immigrants, India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), agreed to keep only Hindus and deport all the non-Hindus

(Pattanaik, 2014). The otherization of minorities from Hindu immigration is deeply rooted in history and a system that simply recognizes someone as refugees when they are Hindu and illegal immigrant or infiltrator when they are Muslim or other minority.

The Indo-Bangla friendship is unnecessarily complicated by this domestic political rhetoric of illegal Bangladeshi migrants crossing the porous border, which has created unhelpful tensions between the countries (Say, 2019).

Bangladesh remains worried about the people listed out from India's national register. India has no clear policy prescriptions concerning where these 1.9 million people will go. Dhaka is precisely worried that it may have to deal with another exodus of million people like Rohingya.

Bangladesh is already overpopulated. About 180 million people live in an area similar to the size of Greece. Ranking as the ninth largest populous nation, it has hosted a million refugees from another country. Inadequate funding and international non cooperation has complicated the existing refugee crisis. At this point, Dhaka cannot take another million from India (Sharma, 2019).

Any possibilities of influxes of people from India to Bangladesh can derail the bilateral ties squandering years of economic and strategic goodwill they built. The chaos will potentially give rise to mass radicalization threatening regional instabilities as well. Such mishandling of bilateral relations would be counterproductive for India too (Sharma, 2019). Realizing this, New Delhi assured Dhaka that NRC is India's internal matter and it will not affect the country.

Bangladesh reached India long before the crisis arose. From the beginning, Bangladesh never agreed with India's accusation of voluntary migration. Instead, Dhaka claimed that they were being trafficked under forced circumstances. This issue is both old and new. It has always been around. However in 2011, both nations reached a deal named Coordination of Border Management Plan (CBMP) to address the dispute (Pattanaik, 2014).

Later in 2015, Bangladesh and India reached a Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of a bilateral task force on Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation and Reintegration of victims and survivors of human trafficking (PM India, 2015).

The activities of the task force include (PM India, 2015)-

1. Prevention of all forms of human trafficking and ensurance of speedy investgitaion, trials and prosecutions of traffickers and organized slime sysndicates in either country
2. Preventive measures to eliminate human trafficking of women and children and protecting victims's rights
3. Guarantee the repatriation of the victims and effective reintegration of the survivors by their country of origin or repatriation

The task force jointly organize regula meetings and coordinates the actions against individual and agents of human trafficking

Chapter V

Bilateral Relations with China

Bangladesh's relation with China has seen dramatic shifts from a former adversary to a strategic partner now. On records, China opposed the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Later it even vetoed Bangladesh's inclusion into the United Nations. From such a point of history, the relation has taken a significant turn (Bhattacharjee, 2018). Forty-eight years later today, Bangladesh turns out to be calling China an all-weather friend. The friendship has graduated into a strategic partnership during the Chinese president's visit to Bangladesh in 2016. Earlier in 1976, shortly after the assassination of Bangladesh's independence leader and the first Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a military dictator, took over Bangladesh and officially visited communist China as Bangladesh's first head of state. The visit was the beginning of the relationship. Later the democratically elected leaders continued the relationship. Today both nations share a partnership in trades, defense, and political affairs (Bhattacharjee, 2018). Among others, the defense tie is considered as a major aspect of this relation. The only country that Bangladesh has some sort of defense partnership is China. Economic relation is the single most crucial aspect. Meanwhile, China has become Bangladesh's biggest trading partner. However, the trade gap is also as big. The following section will critically discuss a few other selected areas as well.

I. Bilateral Cooperation

Both nations reiterated their commitments to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence based on their bilateral ties. These principles include (1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, (2) mutual non-interference, (3) mutual non-aggression, (4) mutual benefits, and finally (5) peaceful coexistence (MFA, 2014).

As mentioned earlier, the Chinese President visiting Bangladesh in 2016 was the first visit by its head of state in 30 years. The visit is thus regarded as a historic milestone achieved in their fresh

efforts to strengthen bilateral relations. A total of 21 agreements worth US\$ 40 billion were signed. China immediately offered the US\$ 24 billion Line of Credit to implement them. It was the largest amount Bangladesh has ever received till the date. Most of the credit given to infrastructure projects are currently being implemented nationwide. With these economic elevations, the relation has later shifted to a strategic partnership (GRID 91, 2017). Because of these fresh investments, the bilateral trade is expected to surpass US\$ 30 billion as early as by the year 2021. Bangladesh's imports from China jumped by 20 percent, and its exports to China increased by 40 percent soon after 2011. China's lifting tariff barriers on many Bangladeshi goods under Asia Pacific Free Trade Agreement is one of many reasons behind the growth (GRID 91, 2017). Today Bangladesh exports many items, but apparels dominate the sector. Other exporting products, however, include fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and other aquatic invertebrates. Agricultural products, rawhides, plastic materials, footwear, and furniture are among the exporting items (Bangladesh Embassy, 2017). On the other hand, Bangladesh imports Chinese machinery, electric and electronic equipment, medical apparatus, vehicles, iron, steel, infrastructural equipment, and other agricultural items.

As much as China is interested in investments, Bangladesh also ensures an environment for Beijing that ultimately accelerates the growth. Some of the investment attractiveness of Bangladesh include (Bangladesh Embassy, 2017).

1. A democratic nation with market-oriented economic policies in place
2. The steady growth of GDP (6+) for the last decade
3. Exemption from income tax of foreign companies for training Bangladeshi labor forces
4. Disciplined, easily trainable and budget labor pool in Bangladesh
5. Language efficiency (English) of the workforces
6. Legal protection for foreign private investment under Promotion and Protection Act 1980
7. Bilateral agreements to avoid double taxation with China
8. Repatriation of dividend and full capital returns for companies planning to leave

9. Five years of tax holidays for foreign investment in Dhaka and Chittagong and seven years in other Bangladeshi cities
10. Duty-free imports of machinery
11. Cash incentives and subsidies for selected products
12. Export policy 2012-14 liberalizing trade regime and emphasizing labor-intensive export-oriented production
13. Less civil unrest, high-security implications, and homogeneous society

II. Economic Cooperation

Economic relation is the key to this bilateral tie. Realizing it, both the Prime Minister and the President jointly inaugurated industries, companies, power plants, among others, during the Chinese president's visit in 2016. A large amount of Chinese investment was poured into Bangladesh. Among others, infrastructures, power and energy, industrial capacity-building, transportations, information and communication technology, and agriculture received these investments. Free Trade Areas in the forms of Economic and Industrial Zones were being constructed to implement these projects. Bangladesh also received Chinese assistance in water management, nuclear energy, and defense training under the Joint Economic and Trade Commission. Later, Ready-made Garments, natural gas, and maritime sectors also started to receive Chinese investments (GRID 91, 2017).

Bangladesh's largest source of imports is China making it the largest trading partner. Currently, the bilateral trade stands at US\$ 18.7 billion, with an actual possibility of growing more (Prothomalo, 2019). If the trade continues to this extent, the volume will go well beyond US\$ 18 billion by next year, 2021, when Bangladesh will celebrate the Golden Jubilee (50 years) of its independence anniversary (Belt and Road New, 2019). In the last four and a half-decade, Bangladesh's relation with China is at an all-time high. In understanding the size of China's economic engagements in Bangladesh, the following few major projects will provide clear images (Belt and Road New, 2019).

1. Construction of 4-lane Dhaka-Chittagong Highway as the largest infrastructure project for roads
2. Shenzhen-Shanghai Stock Exchange Consortium purchased approximately 25 percent of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (India's National Stock Exchange bid it 56 percent less, losing to buy the share) (Siddique, 2019).
3. Construction of Padma Bridge Rail Link Project
4. Construction of 1320 MW coal-fired thermal power plant in Payra
5. Construction of Multi-lane Tunnel project under the Karnaphuli river
6. Construction of Sewage Treatment Plant in Dasherbandi by China's Exim Bank

There are a number of other small and medium level infrastructures and projects that are either being implemented or signed. Many of these projects are explained in detail in different relevant sections.

III. Ready-made Garments

While Bangladesh's domestic economy largely depends on agriculture, the most foreign exchange comes from apparel industries. The Ready-made Garment sector is accountable for more than 82 percent of its exports (GRID 91, 2017).

For these successes, Bangladesh, as well as other factors, contributed to it. Following the World Trade Organization's membership in 2001, China eventually succeeded as the world's largest exporter of textile products. With socioeconomic growth and the rise of middle-class populations in China, the wage started to rise as well. The production cost increased. As Chinese companies are shifting towards high-margin, high-end, and high-tech industries (such as Information Technologies, Aerospace, Telecommunication, and so on), their existing labor-intensive industries start relocating to places where they provide quality products at a cheaper rate. So China started to look for an alternative country with cheaper labor. There came Bangladesh for

China to outsource. Bangladesh has one of the world's most low paying workforces that China currently exploits. Bangladesh, having relatively young and working demography aged 16 to 30, becomes China's favorite destination (Fuad, 2017). It applies to other foreign industries established in China as well. Due to the same rising labor wages and production costs, many other foreign industries based in China start moving to Bangladesh as well. A number of 9 Exports Processing Zones and over 100 of Special Economic Zones work as growth enablers and branding mechanisms for Bangladesh at this moment (Belt and Road New, 2019).

Taking the opportunities, Bangladesh gets to export garments, knitwear, woven fabrics, leather products to China. In exchange, China exports machinery and raw materials for the industries. With China's help, Bangladesh's Ready-made Garments industries grew so big that they contribute about 6% of the global production. Bangladesh ranks just after China as the second-largest producer of apparel products (GRID 91, 2017). Zara, H&M, Levi's, to name a few among major international apparel brands, established their offices in Bangladesh amid ever-increasing demands for Dhaka's ready-made garments worldwide.

China continues to support the sector. The recent cancellation of export orders by foreign buyers due to the Coronavirus pandemic has slowed down Bangladesh's Ready-made Garments industries. Textile industries contribute to 12 percent of Bangladesh's GDP and 84% of its exports, as mentioned earlier. The pandemic has declined this growth. Bangladesh reached out to China to bail out its economic stagnance. China waived tariffs on 97% of Bangladeshi products to enter the Chinese market. Some 5,161 products will receive this preferential zero-tariff treatment. The announcement will at least help survive this particular industry hit hard by the pandemic. Bangladesh received these benefits as a Least Developed Country in the list.

Bangladesh's exports to China are US\$831 million, and China's export to Bangladesh is US\$13.86 billion. So the trade gap is already so wide that this preferential treatment will not necessarily resolve it (Singh, 2020).

Critically understanding, there is not so much utility of this preferential treatment other than boosting some kind of excitement in the industries. When Bangladesh is at its low, China extending its helping hands actually builds a positive image for China in Bangladesh that China does in forms of public diplomacy. The motive behind China allowing Bangladesh to offer zero-tariff access to its markets is self-serving rather than pulling Bangladesh out from the crisis. Many often finger at it as China's strategy of a trap. China will use it to pressurize Bangladesh to bend over and leverage it to get Bangladesh into what China wants: more investments.

IV. Infrastructure Development

While leading international financial institutions refuse to lend Bangladesh to build many of its most ambitious infrastructure projects, China immediately steps up and offers support to Dhaka (Kabir, 2015). As much as Bangladesh wanted, China also waited for every chance to get involved. In a decade, the most significant infrastructural investment that Bangladesh ever received came from China. Alongside their governments, Chinese firms also pumped credits in infrastructure and technical cooperation projects. Economic Relations Divisions of Bangladesh and Development of Outward Investments and Economic Cooperation of China agree to work together in implementing these projects. It is the first effort ever bringing all the organizations under the umbrella of joint coordination and implementation.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank plays a crucial role in providing loans to Bangladesh. In 2016, the bank provided about US\$ 165 million in loans to energy and power infrastructures. In March 2017, the bank extended another US\$ 60 million addressing Bangladesh's energy deficiency (GRID 91, 2017).

Moreover, Jiangsu Etern of China and Power Grid Company of Bangladesh reached a deal to develop an electrical network system. The project includes 1000 kilometer transmission lines and 100 grid substations. This Chinese company will implement the US\$ 305 million power plant project (GRID 91, 2017).

Chinese investment goes beyond energy and power infrastructures. It has also pledged US\$ 83 million in building the Disaster Emergency Operation Centre and Information Platform.

Another company, China Railway Construction Corp Ltd, won a bid of implementing Padma Bridge Rail Link from Dhaka to Jessore. The project plans to build 14 rail stations, 66 main bridges, 244 small bridges, and to buy 100 passenger coaches. The project costs US\$ 4.44 billion. It is an extension of the Trans-Asian railway project connecting Asia and Europe (GRID 91, 2017).

Sitakunda to Cox's Bazar marine drive expressway, Dhaka-Chittagong rail link, Dhaka-Ashulia elevated expressway is among significant projects currently being funded by China.

The bilateral successes reach to the level of accomplishments through many landmark initiatives. The construction of Padma Bridge was an event that received the largest Chinese investment in transportation ever. The construction costs US\$ 3.7 billion when China alone loans US\$ 3.0 billion. This loan was part of China's US\$ 30 billion infrastructure development package (Belt and Road New, 2019).

Bangladesh requested China for another US\$ 6.4 billion for a total of 9 infrastructure projects. The construction of Bangladesh's longest bridges and an ambitious port were included in this expensive proposal. With Chinese loans, Bangladesh's Economic Relations Division plans to use US\$ 1.6 billion to expand Payra seaport and US\$1.2 billion for a 10 km bridge between Barisal and the island of Bhola crossing two rivers in the Ganges delta (GCR, 2020).

The first phase of the Payra port was completed in 2016. It will eventually cost US\$ 15 billion. Bangladesh wants to expand more with additional loans (GCR, 2020). The China Harbour Engineering Company and the China State Engineering and Construction Corp received the contract. The seaport requires at least US\$ 1 billion for dredging purposes. The dredging will shift 100 million cubics of materials to create navigation in the Bay of Bengal (GCR, 2020).

V. Defense Cooperation

One of the many dimensions of this complex relationship is security. More than a decade ago, in 2005, for the first time, Bangladesh started to switch from India to China as the principal source of imports, especially when it came to defense procurements.

In the context, pivoting too much towards India for Bangladesh meant damaging its ability to continue to receive Chinese military investments. China takes the chance and aggressively starts investing in Bangladeshi defense, a competitive area India struggles too hard to inroad (Ballard, 2018).

Bangladesh reached a defense agreement with China in 2002. The deal was considered as the first of its kind for Bangladesh to ever sign with a country. The deal offered Bangladesh a comprehensive framework of cooperation with China. Immediately it received a supply of 65 artillery guns and 114 missiles, including Armored Personnel Carriers, artillery pieces, and small arms. Military cooperation continued. In 2006, Bangladesh purchased some 16 F-7BG, Chengdu J-7 fighter aircraft from China. Two years later, in 2008, China helped Bangladesh establish its first anti-ship missile pad in Chittagong port and successfully conducted its first 120 km missile test in the Bay of Bengal. In 2010, Bangladesh received five maritime patrol vessels, two corvettes, 44 tanks, 15 fighter jets, and anti-ship missiles (surface-to-air) (Shamrat, 2018).

In May 2014, Bangladesh and China signed four defense treaties. According to these treaties, China will provide military support, train armed forces, and supply logistics. There are separate agreements on arms sales as well. According to the deals, China commissioned two navy frigates to Bangladesh in the same year. Bangladesh purchased tanks, aircraft, anti-ship missiles, and other forms of arms (Sikha, 2014).

China is also involved in Dhaka's first space mission. The state-owned Bangladesh Communication Satellite Company Ltd launched a satellite as the 57th country to have access to space (Sikha, 2014). The satellite called Bangabandhu-1 will be used for telecommunications purposes. Bangladesh used foreign satellites until 2007 when the military banned its use, fearing information espionage (Mahmud, 2018). With two ground stations in Joydebpur near Dhaka and Betbunia near Chittagong, the satellite will provide Ku-band and C-band television broadcast and data relay services across the country, ending dependency on foreign rents. Facilitated by China, Bangladesh's entry to South Asian space spell competition for India (The Print, 2018).

Regarding military security, Bangladesh has always got China whenever it needed. It enjoys a unique advantage from China in many ways. Many of them include emergency support. During a time when many countries, including India, refused to sell defense equipment to Bangladesh, China immediately agreed. Today, approximately 70% of Bangladesh's defense equipment comes from China (Rahman, 2014), and Bangladesh becomes the second biggest importer of Chinese arms and ammunition.

Limited funds and relatively lower price motivates Bangladesh to buy this Chinese military equipment. No countries deliver arms as affordable as China. So it is more of an economic calculation than strategic intentions (which India suspects) (Sikha, 2014). Besides, China sells them on credits and soft loans easing the conditions.

Basically, these are the factors behind Bangladesh rebuilding its defense system. The country wants to develop three-dimensional forces on air, surface, and subsurface. As Bangladesh seeks to build its defense system, the People's Liberation Army Navy lobbied to sell arms and ammunition. In November 2016, Bangladesh bought two Chinese submarines in line with the master plan of implementing the above mentioned three-dimensional capabilities. They are Type 0356 Diesel-Electric submarines, to be exact. Both of them reportedly cost US\$ 203 million (GRID 91, 2017). A submarine base will be built in Chittagong's Kutubdia Island for them (Sikha, 2014).

Several factors push Bangladesh towards moderate militarization. They are both traditional and non-traditional in nature. In 2012, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Seas awarded Bangladesh 111,631 sq km of maritime territories in the Bay of Bengal. Earlier, Myanmar claimed the area (Haque, 2015). Again in 2013, the Permanent Court of Arbitration awarded Bangladesh another 19, 467 sq of additional sea areas in the bay (Habib, 2014). India claimed these areas for a long time.

The bay is vital to Bangladesh's economy. About 80 percent of Bangladesh's imports pass through the Chittagong port (Sikha, 2014). Rebuilding armed forces, especially modernizing the navy, Bangladesh attempts to consolidate these newly found territories, secure the ports and protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity.

However, there are a number of non-traditional security threats as well. Growing piracy and natural disasters, among others, equally motivate Bangladesh to rebuild its military (Sikha, 2014).

As Bangladesh is eager to strengthen its military, China welcomes to help Dhaka as much as it helps itself. Beijing maintains military-to-military cooperation with Dhaka (The Economic Times, 2016). The cooperation includes exchanges of high-level visits, joint exercises, joint security operations in areas of counterterrorism, anti-piracy, disaster management, and peacekeeping operations (bdnews24.com, 2017). China's People's Liberation Army visited Chittagong twice in the last two years. Meanwhile, a growing number of Bangladeshi officers also traveled to China for training and exchange programs. As part of the exchange program, officers of both countries enrolled in courses in each other's defense colleges.

China did not have access to the strategic Indian ocean. Reaching deals with Bangladesh, China gets access to one of the world's busiest commercial sealines, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Many claims, arming Bangladesh's military, China plots to wage a shadow war against

New Delhi in the Indian ocean. Applying the String of Pearl theory, China seeks to expand its influences through the acquisition and constructions of defense facilities to improve its relations with Bangladesh (and potentially isolate India) (Malhotra, 2018). China, however, persists that the motive is getting access to the bay rather than building bases. Beijing plans to connect its landlocked Yunnan province to the Bay of Bengal through the BRI initiative (Sikha, 2014).

Bangladesh's deployment of Chinese built submarines has strategically made India uncomfortable (Kabir, 2015). Melting down from its previously held views, India commits to offer submarine training to the Bangladesh navy for the first time. India realized that keeping Bangladesh uninvested or unengaged will only benefit China. The recent move of India to accessing Bangladesh's ports is an attempt to balance China's growing presence (Anwar, 2019). Over the years, India consistently remains interested in the Bay of Bengal littoral, to establish India's connections to South-East Asia. For India, Bangladesh is considered a doorway to reach South East Asia, where India plans to grow its presence (Say, 2019). In doing so, India seeks to get leverage from Bangladesh in its competition with China.

As China and India seek to grow their presence in the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh bargains to build its military and turns neighbor's rivalries into billions of dollars of investments it needs to build defense systems (Rahman, 2014). As infrastructures transform in the bay, Dhaka prepares to exercise its role as a leader in the Bay of Bengal, increasing connectivity towards Southeast Asia for its benefits (Xavier, 2017).

VI. Energy Cooperation

Energy and infrastructure make China more relevant and competent than other external investors, potentially India. Both Bangladesh's growing demands for energies and China's ability to supply tie them together.

Soon after the first half of the fiscal year 2019, Bangladesh received US\$ 600 million related to power generation. Comparatively, India invested US\$ 65 million during the same period. Most of China's investment, during the fiscal year 2018-19, went to power generation. It was US\$ 407 million (Siddique, 2019).

These funds mainly went to two coal-fired power plants in Chittagong and Patuakhali. Another 13,00 MW power plant is also agreed to be built in Cox's Bazar. With the construction of these power plants, the energy capacity has increased from 2 percent to 50 percent. A supply of 23,00 MW power plants eased Bangladesh's long-standing energy crisis. Based on all these investments, Bangladesh becomes a country where China will build more coal-fired power plants than anywhere else. Approximately US\$ 7 billion of Chinese investments are being spent in the sector (Siddique, 2019).

Another amount of US\$ 850 million was also requested to manage the Teesta river project. Plus, US\$ 800 million was demanded to build a technology park improving electricity transmission and distribution (GCR, 2020).

VII. Natural Gas

China's Zhenhua Oil firm purchased a natural gas field in Bibiyana, Jalalabad, and Moulavi Bazar in Bangladesh. It purchased the ownership from Chevron for US\$ 2 billion. The deal is going to be China's first energy investment in Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh still exercises the right to the first refusal of these natural gas fields (GRID 91, 2017). Along with these foreign exploration firms, Bangladesh's own Petrobangla is also involved. Partnering with these international firms ensures Bangladesh's control over these fields.

It is to note that Bangladesh relies approximately 75% on natural gas. Chinese investments in gas fields greatly better Bangladesh's growing gas crisis and add to the growth of its economy. Bangladesh still does not have the required funds to achieve technological capabilities and

infrastructures to realize its oil and gas reserves. Reportedly the Bay of Bengal has a reserve of 200 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and in the land, it has another 13.77 trillion cubic feet reserves. Chinese investments crucially help Bangladesh to explore and extract natural gas and oil resources from the shales (GRID 91, 2017).

VIII. Belt and Road Initiatives

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), erstwhile known as the One Belt and One Road (OBOR) project, is China's way of integrating the world. Chinese President Xi Jinping came up with this project of increasing connectivity and cooperation between his country and the rest of the world. BRI is regarded as the project of the century, as many say. The Belt and Road Initiative aims at redirecting China's overcapacity and domestic flow for regional development (Mazid, 2019). In 2016, Bangladesh became South Asia's first country to support the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (Saimum, 2017). China sees Bangladesh as a nation that can bridge between South and Southeast Asia.

BRI Initiative mainly consists of roads and sea routes. The Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt are two basic components of the Belt and Road Initiative. Under the BRI project, Bangladesh received most of the funds (US\$ 40 billion). They include US\$ 26 billion for BRI projects and another US\$ 14 billion for joint ventures (The Daily Star, 2019).

The Silk Road Economic Belt may exclusively focus on Eurasian regions. However, China still identifies Bangladesh as a pivotal player in this BRI initiative.

Maritime Silk Road is a sister project of the Silk Road Economic Belt. It plans to revive an old sea route for trade purposes. As usual, China considers Bangladesh as an ally and committed member of this initiative as well. The Bay of Bengal has long been used as intercontinental and regional trade routes. Because of having a strategic access point to the Indian Ocean, one of 6 major economic corridors and precisely one of only two maritime corridors will pass through

Bangladesh's southern ports (The Daily Star, 2019). Bangladesh is a significant hub of maritime and overland connectivity, especially for China's landlocked province, Yunnan. China wants to utilize Bangladesh's ports to link its nearby Yunnan province to the Indian ocean bypassing the long-distance of Malacca straits (Singh, 2020). Approximately 80 percent of Chinese imports of energy transport through the long way of Malacca straits in the Indian Ocean. Bangladesh's Chittagong ports cut this long way short for China while providing Beijing with a dominant presence in the Indian ocean. This is how Bangladesh becomes a critical regional player in China's Belt and Road Initiative (Fuad, 2017).

This corridor will also be used as a gateway for Bangladesh to look beyond India's South Asia. Hence, Bangladesh's Look East policy is designed to reach ASEAN nations with China's help in exchange. Parallely there is another initiative in place as well. Bangladesh looks to connect China's Yunnan province and Southeast Asia by implementing a strategic route called Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC). Earlier in 1999, the initiative was called the Kunming Initiative. After a decade of discussions, the BCIM-E forum has been a tool of integrating Bangladesh into China's sub-regional initiative. BCIM-E is closely related to the Belt and Road Initiative. Again, Bangladesh was the first South Asian country to back China's BCIM-EC initiative.

Bangladesh agreed to a number of Chinese initiatives under the BRI initiative. Few of these notable side initiatives include Belt and Road Energy Partnership, Digital Silk Road Initiative, Belt and Road Studies Network, Belt and Road Studies Network, and Belt and Road News Network, to name a few. Digital BRI emphasizes the digital integration of Bangladesh to the connectivity process (The Daily Star, 2019).

China Kunming International Logistics and Finance Association funds these initiatives. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Fund has been financing since 2014 (Mazid, 2019). However, China launched three financial institutions, specially dedicated to financing the BRI related

initiatives. They include the Asian Infrastructure Bank, the New Development Bank, and the Silk Road Fund.

All of these initiatives create new market demands at local levels in Bangladesh. The GDP growth of BRI signatory countries has at least an average of 4.2 percent compared to 2.6 percent of the global average. By 2050 the BRI region is expected to contribute 80 percent of global GDP.

IX. Cultural Exchange

Bangladesh and China plan to extend their relations beyond the economy. Cultural exchanges in forms of tourism, education, and healthcare are being promoted. In 2019, the cultural ties saw unprecedented development. A record number of 5,000 Bangladeshi students went to China to study, while about 37 000 people visited China in 2019 (Prothomalo, 2020).

In addition, China's Yunnan, the nearest province to Bangladesh, emerged as a major hub for medical-related travels. Success in medicinal inventions, therapeutic treatments, and cancer prevention provided this status to the province. China's Yunnan is closer than India's south, where most of the Bangladeshis visit to see doctors. China continues to develop medical infrastructure with a guarantee of better healthcare at lower prices to attract Bangladeshis patients (Kumar, 2018).

Bangladeshis travel to India for medical purposes more than any other country. They account for approximately 55 percent of India's health tourists. Around 120,388 Bangladeshis visited India in 2015. After two years, the numbers increased to 221 751 in 2017. Over the last three years, the inflow of Bangladeshi health tourists increased by 83 percent. The statistics are still growing.

X. Environmental Cost

Bangladesh is going from a power shortage to overcapacity. The capacity had transformed from 4,942 MW in 2009 to 13,885 MW in 2015. Bangladesh is now on its way to reach 24,000 MW capacity by 2022 from its current capacity of 17,000 MW (Ahmed, 2019). Bangladesh plans to achieve 40,000 MW capacity by 2030. The energy sector is growing rapidly (Danqing & Yan, 2019). It is to say that Bangladesh will multiply power generation in the years to come. Most of these power plants Bangladesh has are based on coals that emit significant amounts of greenhouse gases. Despite being one of the most affected nations by climate change, the giant carbon bomb in the world is yet to be exploded in Bangladesh. At least 29 coal-fired power plants are currently being constructed to produce about 33200 MW energy with an increase of 63 times. China is involved in more than half (at least 15) of these projects producing 18,000 MW. Among foreign ownership, China's state-owned companies share over 30 percent ownership of these power plants. To compare, India's ownership of Bangladeshi power plants is only 3 percent. At least 25 out of 29 power plants will import foreign coals to run the plants. About 20 million metric tonnes of coals is projected to be imported for Pyra power plants alone every year. Another power plant called Matabari plans to import approximately 41 million tons of coal by 2042.

All these imports demonstrate a 4,000 percent increase from current imports (1.5 Million Tonnes per Annum). It would cost Bangladesh approximately US\$ 2 billion a year to import foreign coal, creating a negative trade balance. In the last three years, Bangladesh jumped to 6th from 12th in the ranking of coal power capacities. All of these power plants are being built directly, violating the Paris Agreement of limiting global warming below 2 degrees celsius. A total of 115 million tonnes of Carbon Dioxide will be released from these power plants in a year. They would produce an alarming amount of 4,600 Mt CO₂ in their lifetime. This is shockingly 20% more emissions than all of Japan's power plants combined (Market Forces, 2019).

With unsustainable economic development comes challenges. Environmentalists and other civil activists see these Chinese investments benefiting as much as harming nature and, eventually, the

country. When other Asian neighbors and the world are transforming their energies sectors, Bangladesh is being trapped into traditional self-destructive projects funded by China. Not shifting towards renewable and environment-friendly sectors will eventually lead to temporary solutions. Many argue that China pays little to no attention to the sustainability of these projects (Siddique, 2019). The 1320 MW Rampal power plant finally sparked the mass public protests because of its connection to threatening the world's largest mangrove forest called Sundarbans, listed as UNESCO World Heritage in 1997. The plant would irreversibly devastate the forest, especially the last remaining habitat for many endangered species, including Bengal tigers, and impact over half a million locals who rely on the forest ecosystem for livelihoods. Media has widely reported that land acquisition and mass displacements had already caused suffering to the local community living there for generations. Human rights violations, corruption related to relocation, and compensation processes have added to the suffering rather than resolving. An outcry of the global community demanded that the plant be shut down (Market Forces, 2019).

XI. Debt Trap

China is a key development partner. Bangladesh receives investments in major infrastructure projects. China earns a positive public impression, which it capitalizes in gaining chances to invest more. Bangladesh appreciates Chinese loans as much as it is fearful of any debt trap. Bangladesh and China reached deals worth billions of dollars over energy sectors and infrastructures. Many remain concerned that investments of this volume will eventually end up as Bangladesh being trapped in Chinese debt. Over the recent few years, China has invested more money in Bangladesh than anywhere else. Bangladesh is the second-biggest recipient of Chinese money in the region. The country has seen a record of Foreign Direct Investment. In 2018, Dhaka attracted US\$ 3.6 billion of FDI, which is about 68 percent higher than the previous year. Beijing alone provides one-third of these investments (Ahmed, 2019). To implement power and infrastructure projects under China's Belt and Road Initiative, both countries signed deals amounting to US\$21.5 billion. Later China pledged more (US\$38 billion) related to these BRI

projects. This loan is only 6 percent of the total debt Bangladesh owes to China (Prothom Alo, 2019).

The more China investments, the more Bangladesh relies on Chinese money. Chinese money has created a new source of funding for Bangladesh; when traditional sources are not sufficient to generate money, it needs to build the country (Ahmed, 2019).

Chinese investments come in both equity and debt. The infrastructure projects, however, are mostly being carried out through debt financing. Moreover, many label China's infrastructure project as a debt instrument for interest rates as high as 16 percent (Fuad, 2017). To learn about debt financing, Bangladesh does not need to look so far. It gets a lesson from another South Asian country called Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka had to cede ownership of its Hambantota port to China for 99 years after failing to repay the debts (Ahmed, 2019). There are a few instances of debt traps in Africa as well.

Dhaka's trade gap goes in favor of China. During the fiscal year 2018 -19, China's exports to Bangladesh was US\$ 13638 million when Bangladesh's exports to China stood at only US\$ 568 million. The bilateral trade deficit has reached a historic 16 folds over the last two decades (Chaudhury, 2020).

However, many still argue that Bangladesh's efficient management of all these debts protects it from falling into any debt trap. On records, Bangladesh has never failed to repay any of its foreign debts. Moreover, Bangladesh has one of the fastest-growing GDP growth rates in the world. Plus, its budget deficit is just below 5 percent (The Daily Star, 2020). All these indicate that Bangladesh has the ability to avoid debt traps. Bangladesh has demonstrated examples of debt management. Recently Dhaka has declined a Chinese project of constructing a 214 km of highway from its capital to the northeastern region. Bangladesh did not want to take the risk of another US\$ 2 billion in implementing the project. It has decided to implement the project on its funds at a lower cost of around US\$ 1.5 billion (Lindberg and Lahiri, 2018). There are few other

examples of Bangladesh turning away Chinese funds. The country struggles a bit to repay loans of grossly overpriced Chinese projects. Therefore, Bangladesh practices responsible borrowing for not to fall into the debt trap. However, it still takes time to know how Bangladesh ends up in these concerns finally.

Chapter VI

Bilateral Relations between India and China

The degree of competition and cooperation between Beijing and New Delhi is at the center of a balance that Bangladesh takes advantage of. This segment of the thesis critically assesses the current, as well as historical events that define the bilateral relations between these two countries. It mainly highlights economic interdependence, a few disputes and what they contribute to the future of the balance. This part of the thesis unpacks how these competitions, if they turn into major conflicts, polarize Bangladesh in a context that the island of Melos has experienced.

To begin with a general overview, both India and China are set to celebrate 70 years of their diplomatic relationships this year. Both nations established their formal relations back in 1950 (Rappai, 2020). After the Chinese Communist Party took over China under Chairman Mao Zedong, India was the first non-socialist bloc state to officially recognize the People's Republic of China. Decolonization movements of the fifties, shared struggles and the vision of Resurgent Asia further strengthened their ties. Same as Bangladesh, both nations based their relations on five principles of coexistence, known as Panch Sheel (Rappai, 2020).

However, the bonhomie did not last too long. Tibet, the inheritance of colonial territories and other border disputes, led them to a war in 1962. After more than a decade in 1976, both sides managed to restore their ties at least at an ambassadorial level (Rappai, 2020). A chronology of events that shaped the bilateral relations have been discussed below, in the section called "Major Events in India and China's Bilateral Relations".

When neither side ever completely recovered from the memory of the war. They engaged in another fresh border clash in June 2020 that became a turning point. Soldiers on both sides were engaged in a violent faceoff in the Himalaya. It killed 20 Indian soldiers. China did not disclose

the number. The escalation casts a long shadow on the bilateral ties and figures out underlying roots that still trouble their ties (Choudhury, 2020).

The Line of Actual Control, dividing China and India, is neither clearly demarcated nor bilaterally recognized. It leads militaries on both sides to intrude into one another's territories. As a classic dilemma, whenever one side consolidates its stance near the border, the other views it as provocation and threats to territorial integrity (Zhu, 2020).

Following the recent border clashes and for Coronavirus pandemic, anti-Chinese sentiment grew louder in India with mass calls of boycotting Chinese products and canceling contracts with Chinese businesses nationwide (Zhu, 2020).

However, India practices strategic autonomy. It has been reluctant to engage in major alliances countering China, even though both are stuck in bilateral disputes. However, many believe that this border incident may push India away from China to align with others. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) has already urged India to play a bigger role in the Indo-Pacific region. Its eventual participation in the Quad will be a strategic nightmare for Beijing.

I. Bilateral Disputes

Most of the bilateral disputes between India and China are territorial. They are as old as their relations. Immediately after recognizing China in 1950, India realized it had conflicts of interest with China over Tibet, a territory that had served as a buffer zone between two countries and inherited special privileges from colonial Britain. However, Mao Zedong considered Tibet as an integral part of China, and he viewed India's concerns over it as a manifestation of interference in internal affairs (Chaubey, 2017). Tibet was the beginning of their bilateral disputes. Fearing India's moves, later China abolished lamaism and feudalism, reasserting control over Tibet (Coleman, 1998).

In 1954, India published a map that included Aksai Chin, a part of Kashmir occupied by China (Pannu, 2020). In 1959, China stated that it did not agree on McMahon Line, a line that demarcated the eastern border between India and Tibet (Times of India, 2017). With that declaration, China technically claimed lands that were controlled by India then. For example, China claimed approximately 104,000 square kilometers of Indian territory as a response (Lal, 2008, p. 68). Following China's decision, the spiritual head of Tibet, Dalai Lama, left China and took refuge in Himachal Pradesh of India, where he established the Tibetan Government in exile (Financial Express, 2019). Later, thousands of refugees followed him and settled in India. Today approximately 1, 27, 935 Tibetans live in India. Beijing has always viewed India's accommodation of Tibetan refugees as a threat to China's national security and territorial integrity.

Bilateral belligerence further deteriorated. In October 1962, border disputes eventually led to a war between the countries. Until this day, it was the only war that took place between them. It ended with the defeat of India, for the record. Meanwhile, China expanded more and occupied critical strategic points of Aksai Chin and Ladakh's strategic Demchok regions before the unilateral ceasefire after a month (Singh, 2012).

The war ultimately ended the bilateral relations that sustained until the early 1970s. During this time, China backed Pakistan in its two wars against India and widely ran propaganda campaigns and provided financial, political, and strategic support to insurgent groups and tribes in India's fragile Northeast, as mentioned earlier as Seven Sisters (Manoharan, 2012). India also reportedly financed proxy militancy in Tibet (Jha, 2016). In late 1967, at least two conflicts broke out at the contested borders in Sikkim. They are called Nathu La Incident and Cho La Incident. Over 62 Indian soldiers died in the first incident. In the next incident, 88 Indian soldiers and 300 Chinese soldiers were killed (Chaudhury, 2018).

In 1971, India and China signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation.

In 1979, both countries re-established diplomatic relationships. Both sides reached an understanding on noninterference. As a result, China remained silent on India's Sikkim occupation / absorptions and agreed with India's control over Kashmir and its advisory relation with the Kingdom of Bhutan. For the first time, India integrated Sikkim, once an independent state, as the 22nd state of India's union territory and Bhutan as a protectorate state. On the other hand, China undertook major construction projects and geostrategically integrated Tibet.

In 1994, China and India undertook the Confidence Building Measures. They discussed clarifications of the Line of Control and reduced soldiers at the borders as results.

Their relations reached greater balance. Since the beginning of the 21st century, both countries have remained relatively peaceful and increased their corporations in trade and commerce. However, the border dispute remains unresolved as usual, despite all the progress both sides have made. After the year 1988, New Delhi and Beijing carefully separated border disputes from their overall bilateral relations (Malone and Mukherjee, 2010). Separation of political affairs from economic activities took their relations to greater heights.

Therefore, the possibility of armed conflicts is unlikely, despite the fresh border clash in June 2020 that killed 20 Indian soldiers in the Galwan Valley, Ladakh (Choudhury, 2020). This incident is the largest fatalities that happened in the last four decades. However, neither side used arms. Both sides immediately disengaged and deescalated. Earlier in the summer of 2017, Indian and Chinese soldiers were locked up in a two-month-long standoff at Doklam in the Himalayas. Again, neither side fired a single bullet (Joshi, 2019). The Rule of Engagement (RoE) along the Line of Control bans the use of weapons and ammunition. RoE technically prevents both from major violence. It is highly likely that the tensions along the 2200-mile long un-demarcated borders will continue. So far, four incidents have taken place since 2013. But interestingly, these incidents not turning into large scale conflicts signal that both countries are not interested in any kind of retaliation or major wars. On June 17, both Indian and Chinese foreign ministers agreed to avoid further confrontation. Both sides even agreed to pull off troops from the disputed

borders (Bhaumik, 2020). On the same day, the Indian Prime Minister reiterated their demand for peace as well (Ayres, 2020).

China and India agreed on five principles to ensure peace at disputed gray zones near the borders (Dwivedi, 2020). They include-

1. Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility at borders along the Line of Control (1993)
2. Agreement on Confidence Building Measures (1996) to ban the use of force and engagement in armed hostilities
3. Agreement on Standard Operating Procedures (2005) prohibiting the armed clashes during patrolling
4. Agreement on Consultation and Cooperation (2012)
5. The Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (2013)

The reasons for avoiding these clashes are likely because of domestic challenges both countries face and the greater economic potential they share together. Moreover, the pandemic may have heightened China's concerns about domestic affairs, especially the sovereignty and legitimacy in Hong Kong (Clary and Narang, 2020). At the same time, India seems more interested in national affairs and economic recovery as it is hit hard by the pandemic.

How China and India resolve their disputes will not only define the future of their bilateral relations, but the outcomes, whatever they may be, will have significant implications for Bangladesh. If either side continues to arouse the other at the border, it is likely to polarize Bangladesh and affect its ability to maintain relations with both at the same time.

II. Major Events in India and China's Bilateral Relations (Weidong, 2020)

This section highlights events that have evolved their relations into interdependence. The consolidation of relations has greatly benefited Bangladesh. This segment highlights the relations from a historical point of view that has contributed the present status into the balance. The ongoing balance has benefited Bangladesh more than ever before. After the 1990s, heads of states on both sides regularly exchanged visits that gave the bilateral ties a better sustainability. Some of these events at high levels include-

1. After India's recognition of China in the 1950s, as mentioned before, the famous catchphrase "Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai" (Indians and Chinese are brothers) resounded in both countries for years.
2. In 1954, China and India jointly signed the Five Principles of Coexistence upon China's first president, Zhou Enlai's visit to India. Later in the same year, India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, visited China following the founding of the People's Republic of China.
3. In 1955, Zhou Enlai and Jawaharlal Nehru jointly attended the Asian-African Conference in Indonesia, celebrating solidarity and cooperation.
4. In 1962, the border war created the biggest bilateral dispute (the consequences of the war were discussed in the previous sections)
5. In 1976, both countries restored the relations at the ambassadorial level.
6. In 1988, Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi visited China to normalize bilateral relations. Both sides agreed to look forward.
7. In 1991, President Li Peng of China visited India. The visit restored diplomatic visits at the premier level after a decade of suspension.
8. In 1992, India President R. Venkataraman visited India as the first Indian president.
9. In 1993, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao of India visited China. An agreement was signed between Beijing and New Delhi to maintain peace along the Line of Actual Control.

10. In 1996, Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited India and signed a deal on Confidence Building Measures.
11. In 2000, Indian President KR Narayanan visited Beijing on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between India and China.
12. In 2002, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji visited India to enhance mutual understanding and promote cooperation in various areas.
13. In 2003, the Indian Premier Vajpayee visited China and signed the declaration on the Principles and Comprehensive Cooperation in China-India relations. They agreed to hold meetings of Special Representatives on both sides concerning the boundary settlements.
14. In 2005, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited India. Both signed the Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question.
15. In 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao visited New Delhi. Both sides signed a ten-pronged strategy to deepen the strategic and cooperative partnership.
16. Both nations began the exchange of youth delegation in 2006. The 100-member Indian and Chinese youth delegations exchanged around 14 visits in each others' countries until this year. More than 4 thousand youths on both sides traveled to India and China.
17. In the year 2008, Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh visited China and signed the Shared Vision for the 21st century.
18. In 2010, Indian President Pratibha Patil visited China on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties between India and China.
19. In 2010, Chinese President Wen Jiabao visited India and signed a Joint Communique.
20. In 2011, both countries declared China-India Exchange Year, held a series of people-to-people cultural activities, agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding on the joint compilation of the Encyclopedia of India-China Cultural Contacts, and organized a visit of 500 Indian Youth Delegation to China.
21. In 2012, both sides declared the Year of China-India Friendship and Cooperation. India hosted a delegation of 500 Chinese youths. Premiers of both nations also met on a sideline during a summit in the UN.

22. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the sideline of a conference in Africa. Later, the Indian Prime Minister visited China.
23. In 2014, both sides declared the China-Indian Friendly Exchange Year. President Xi Jinping met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his hometown Gujarat and issued a joint statement on Building Closer Development Partnership.
24. In 2015, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Chinese President Xi Jinping in his hometown Xi'an. China opened the Xizang's Nathu La Pass to Indian pilgrims, and India celebrated India Tourism Year in China.
25. In 2016, both Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China. President Xi Jinping visited India too. They attended the G20 Summit in Hangzhou and BRICS Summit in Goa. Beijing celebrated China Tourism Year in India.
26. In 2017, Xi Jinping met Narendra Modi on a sideline of the SCO Summit in Astana. Later, Narendra Modi met Xi Jinping during the BRICS Summit in Xiamen.
27. In 2018, Xi Jinping informally met Narendra Modi in Wuhan. Modi met Xi again during a summit in Qingdao. Two leaders met again during another summit in Buenos Aires.
28. In 2019, both leaders informally met each other in Chennai and reaffirmed the Wuhan Consensus of building strategic communications. President Xi met Modi twice during SCO Summit in Bishkek and BRICS Summit in Brasilia.
29. In 2020, both countries mark the 70th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between China and India. Both sides declared the year as the China-India Year of Cultural and People-to-People Exchange at all levels, including defense, legislatures, businesses, academics, cultural and youth organizations. A series of 70 celebratory events were agreed to organize bilaterally.
30. Today over two thousand Chinese students pursue their higher studies in India, and more than 20 thousand young Indians study in China.
31. Currently, about 1 million Chinese and Indians visit each other's countries. Approximately 700000 Indians visit Hong Kong, and more than 200,000 Chinese visit India. Also, a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Tourism Sector, signed in May 2015, facilitates bilateral tourism (Embassy of India).

32. At this moment, a number of 34 weekly flights connect major cities in both countries.

III. Bilateral (Inter)dependence

China is India's largest trading partner. For the first time in 2017, the bilateral trade reached an all-time high of US\$ 84.44 billion (Arora and Saxena, 2018). Nevertheless, the trade is greatly skewed in China's favor. From April 2019 to February 2020, China accounted for 11.8 percent of India's total imports. India accounted for only 3 percent of China's imports at the same time. Moreover, in the fiscal year 2018-19, China's exports to India were US\$ 70.3 billion, and its imports from India were US\$ 16.7 billion, leaving the trade gap at US\$ 53.6 billion (Sewda, 2020). About 50 percent of India's trade deficit is contributed by China alone. Currently, India imports seven times more than it exports to China (Sewda, 2020). The trade deficit is one of the world's biggest ones (The Week, 2020).

India mainly exports raw materials to China, while it mostly imports China's manufactured goods (Sewda, 2020). This trade gap systematically limited India's manufacturing abilities. Three decades ago, India and China shared economies of similar size. Today, the Chinese economy grows five times that of India's economy (Sewda, 2020). It fundamentally changed the dynamic of interdependence to dependence.

Addressing the trade war, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated economic self-reliance, known as Atmanirbhar Bharat, to bring supply chains back to India to resist the deficit (Sewda, 2020). In April 2020, India regulated policies on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) requiring foreign countries sharing borders with India, prior approval of the Indian government for doing investments and making business in India (Sewda, 2020). Fearing China's state-owned companies buying Indian companies ravaged by the pandemic, India has become the latest country to restrict Chinese business. By the way, these new FDI policies do not prohibit Chinese investments, but they attempt to regulate and control Chinese investments in India's favour.

As a response, these regulatory policies will prevent Chinese investment from acquiring key stakes in India's major e-commerce and tech startups (Sewda, 2020). It will also protect India's data privacy. Earlier, India accused China of gaining access to data and profiles of large shares of Indian citizens, making them vulnerable to espionage, sabotage, and blackmail.

These economic measures came after growing consensus within New Delhi to reduce reliance on China and Beijing's reluctance to address the mammoth trade gap. China's protectionist policies hindering Indian companies entering Chinese markets have sparked Economic Nationalism in India. New Delhi has repeatedly pushed China to open up its markets to Indian IT and pharmaceuticals, where India has a competitive global advantage. Over 20 percent of global medication products come from India (Arora and Saxena, 2018). But many of these IT and pharmaceutical companies struggle to do business in China.

Nevertheless, two economies are intertwined. The economic interdependence between them is too deep to be ignored. China is Asia's largest economy, while India ranks 3 in the continent (Kapoor, 2020). Sharing a combined market of around 2.7 billion people and 20 percent of the world's GDP, both countries enjoy the potential of economic cooperation and mutual growth (Weidong, 2020).

Many argue that economic interdependence of this degree leads to less conflicting relations, and the economic ties between nations are difficult to overcome because countries rationally realize that the opportunity cost of a conflict is a loss of mutual benefits and growth (Ollapally, 2014).

Below is a list of three major economic milestones both countries achieved over the years that has created an economic interdependence. They include-

1. Since the year 2000, bilateral trade has increased from less than US\$ 3 billion to approximately US\$ 100 billion, with a rise of 32 times (Weidong, 2020).

2. More than 1 thousand Chinese companies have invested nearly US\$ 8 billion in India's industrial parks, e-commerce sectors, and a variety of other areas that have created at least 200,000 jobs across India (Weidong, 2020).
3. On the other hand, about 1 billion Indian companies invested nearly US\$ 1 billion across China while expanding their business. More than two-thirds of these Indian companies reportedly make steady profits in China (Weidong, 2020).

Despite border disputes, trade gaps and strategic rivalry within the region, the economy has made each other more interdependent and integrated than ever before. It is highly likely that their bilateral relations will continue. And a balanced ties between them will likely to integrate Bangladesh within South and Southeast Asia. However, it is also likely that the balance may shift once China tries to translate its economic might into realizing its geostrategic desires.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

The dissertation does not have any recommendations. Based on current affairs and contexts, it instead predicts what is likely to happen in Bangladesh's relations with China and India.

The thesis reaches three observations.

First off, it is highly likely that Bangladesh will continue to benefit from the balance of power. Bangladesh moves towards this direction for reasons. There are apparent costs that come along out of the failure of a balance of relation. If Bangladesh deepens its ties with either one while leaving the other, as the dissertation observes, it will risk itself falling into basically two situations: (1) losing competitive opportunities from both at the same time and (2) paying prices of non-cooperation from the losing side. Therefore, Bangladesh will perceivably continue to engage with India more politically and with China more economically, meaning, politically, Bangladesh will choose India over China and economically, China over India. This is how Dhaka will tend to balance India's political values and China's economic opportunities. At least for some years to a decade.

Secondly, the balance between India and China is likely to continue. Based on the thorough review of bilateral cooperations, as well as competitions between India and China, the thesis concludes that both will continue to compete over Bangladesh. But the competitions will be mostly economic with strategic dimensions. Given the economic interdependence existing between New Delhi and Beijing, their competitions over Dhaka will not turn into rivalry or proxy conflicts on a military scale (earlier Bangladesh dealt with the threats to territorial integrity due to proxy tribal insurgency as reportedly fueled by India, when Dhaka failed to balance and leaned towards Beijing).

Thirdly, if the balance of power falls, Bangladesh will probably align with China. Given the portfolio of Chinese investments in Bangladesh, Dhaka has already leaned towards Beijing. If Bangladesh ends up in a one-sided relationship with China, there is a high chance that Dhaka may face backlash again from China's opposition, India, a country that geostrategically surrounds Bangladesh from three sides. Nothing can ignore that India still has a powerful influence in its neighborhood that it wants to keep. However, there is no doubt either that China has become more assertive than India for the first time, especially in South Asia, precisely over Bangladesh. During intense conflicts between Beijing and New Delhi, Dhaka's failure to align with China will lead to the repetitions of Melos's political mistake. In polarizations, Dhaka will become a protectorate-like state of China, with its security being guaranteed against India. During such a rivalry, not joining either one will probably turn Bangladesh into a pawn (Melos) of proxy conflicts. However, the dissertation does not see it happening, at least in the near future.

Chapter VIII

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