

China's Belt and Road Initiative: Impacts on Bangladesh–India Bilateral Relations

By

Rumi Akter

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Supervisor: Dr. Daniel Large

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned Rumi Akter, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

This is a true copy of the thesis, including final revisions.

Date: June 12, 2020.

Name: Rumi Akter

Signature:

Rumi Akter

Abstract

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is known as the project of the century proclaimed by China in 2013. Bangladesh has been part of this Chinese initiative since 2016. In contrast, Bangladesh's immediate neighbor, India, has not joined the BRI yet claiming it as a threat to India's sovereignty. Bangladesh has been enjoying earnest relations with China in terms of trade and security since 2016. India had used its hard power against Bangladesh when it joined the BRI. However, some recent trends in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations have occurred regardless of Bangladesh's membership in the BRI.

This thesis aims to evaluate the recent trends in the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India, given the BRI context. This thesis seeks to analyze how Bangladesh and India have been dealing with each other after Bangladesh joined the BRI. The Recent trends in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations are explored in terms of trade, security, and the India Ocean region. This thesis finds and shows that since 2016 India has moved from hard power projection to soft power in dealing with Bangladesh. Thus, Indian policymakers are also trying to sustain warm relations with Bangladesh. Finally, this thesis recommends that the Bangladesh government should follow the policy of no inclination to a single country and the pragmatist outlook in its foreign policy formulation so that it can maintain warm relations with every country.

Key Words: BRI, China, Bangladesh, India, Trade, Security, Indian Ocean

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List of Abbreviation

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BIG–B	Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
FOIP	Free and Open Indo Pacific
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
ISP	Indo Pacific Strategy
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAM	Non–Aligned–Movement
OBOR	One Belt One Road
PCA	Permanent Court of Arbitration
PSC	Politburo Standing Committee
QSD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea
WB	World Bank

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Bangladesh and India are the two immediate neighbors of South Asia who have walked along a path of a long history. Since 1971, Bangladesh and India have enjoyed profound bilateral relations, of course, with some ups and downs. However, being an immediate neighbor and surrounded by India in its North, East, and West part, Bangladesh's foreign policymaking has always been cited as India-centric. It is the geographical location of Bangladesh that did not allow it to go beyond its neighborhood. Hence, India has consistently achieved the top priority in policymaking regardless of government changes in Bangladesh. Thus, South Asian scholars often describe India as the "India factor" that influences the foreign policy of Bangladesh (Hossain, 2019). Conversely, when China has risen as not only the Asian giant but also a global power, it has started impacting the Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. The declaration of the BRI and Bangladesh's joining has steered Bangladesh to look beyond India-centric policymaking.

China had become a new actor in global politics and grabbed more attention when, in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proclaimed the revival of the ancient silk road, naming it the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is said to be the most significant development plan in the modern era, known as the most ambitious foreign policy of China. It consists of two routes—the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Cai, 2017). However, China did not propose this "project of the century" abruptly (Clarke, 2018). Before the 18th Party Congress began in 2013, Chinese policymakers and scholars were debating regarding the formulation of China's foreign policy towards its neighboring countries. To discuss China's foreign policy formulation, in 2013, China convened a conference titled "Peripheral Diplomacy

Work Conference,” where all Chinese policymakers, including the entire Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), attended the meeting. Consequently, China came up with two new ideas—peripheral diplomacy and the BRI. The BRI is embedded within China’s peripheral diplomacy as President Xi stated in the conference that “China's neighbors play significant strategic value for China,” and “maintaining stability in China’s neighborhood is the key objective of peripheral diplomacy” (Cai, 2017).

China’s peripheral diplomacy is essential to understand the BRI. Peripheral diplomacy aims to build a “community of common destiny” expanding from the Asia Pacific region encompassing Southeast Asia, East Asia, South Asia, the Indian Ocean region, and reaching throughout Europe and Africa. Henceforth, since the declaration of BRI, China’s neighboring areas become crucial for the development of both the routes of BRI (Zhao, 2018).

Bangladesh officially joined the BRI in 2016 (The Daily Star, 2019). In contrast, India has rejected the BRI. Bangladesh is considered the hub of BRI in the Indian Ocean region, and it intersects at the point where the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road meet (Singh, 2019). Since Bangladesh became part of the BRI, some recent trends have developed in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. Hossain (2019) indicated in his article that the “China Factor” will be one of the factors that will reshape future Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. However, the scholarly world has not explored Indo–Bangladesh bilateral relations and its recent trends in the BRI context. Thus, this thesis will fill the lacuna in the existing literature on Bangladesh–India bilateral relations by looking into the ties from the framework of the BRI.

1.1 Research Question

There are two broader classifications of research questions—variance and process. Variance questions discover the differences and correlations between two or more variables. The problem questions mostly start with “Does,” “How much,” and “Is there.” Process questions identify why and how something happens and figure out the impact of that phenomenon. Thus, these questions are suited for a qualitative research design. Process questions require an open-ended and inductive approach to explore an issue, and often they are developed after the data collection and analysis of the research (Maxwell, 2009, p.232).

1.1.1 Main Research Question

Based on the scholarly aspects of the research question, the research questions of this thesis fit into the category of process questions. The main research question of this thesis is as follows:

“In What ways does China’s Belt and Road Initiative influence the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India?”

1.1.2 Sub Questions

Considering the focus of this thesis, which is quite general and broad, the sub research questions can narrow it down and lead the research in a more specific direction. The sub research questions of this thesis are as follows:

1. What recent changes have occurred in Bangladesh–India economic relations after Bangladesh joined the BRI?
2. What are the recent changes in Bangladesh–India security relations caused by the BRI?

1.2 Research Aims and Relevance

Existing literature on the BRI focuses on either the BRI's overall idea or the BRI and its implications for other regions, especially Southeast Asia and Africa. In general, very few scholarly pieces examine the BRI and South Asia. Some articles and chapters in books articulate the importance of South Asia for BRI. However, compared to other regions, there is minimal work that states the importance of South Asian nations for the development of BRI. Being a part of the BRI, South Asia is one of the crucial points for the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Bangladesh is a South Asian country, a littoral state of the Bay of Bengal of the Indian Ocean. India also surrounds Bangladesh in its North, East, and West sides; thus, Bangladesh and India share the most extensive land border amongst the South Asian nations. Neighboring Bangladesh, India always dominates the foreign policy of Bangladesh. However, when Bangladesh officially joined the BRI in 2016, India did not positively perceive this decision of Bangladesh. The existing literature on the BRI does not focus on any bilateral relations between countries. Considering the historical ties between Bangladesh and India, this research will determine the answers to the research questions and will conclude.

1.3 Limitations

I have tried to conduct the research comprehensively and coherently as much as possible. However, there are still some limitations to this thesis. Firstly, this thesis explored trade, security, and the Indian Ocean region only to examine the changing dynamics in Bangladesh–India relations as most of the existing literature and the expert interviews focus on these issues. Thus, this thesis did not explore other possible aspects. Secondly, the interviewees were from academia, and due to the pandemic, this thesis could not make it to involve practitioners or

policymakers from Bangladesh and India. Hence, it lacks the policymakers' perception of bilateral relations. The involvement of diverse respondents could have made this research a more comprehensive one.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. **Chapter one** includes the introduction of the research, research question, research aim and relevance, and structure of the argument. **Chapter two** reviews the literature based on a regional setting. By exploring the existing literature, this chapter finds that the current scholarship on BRI has not studied any bilateral relations between countries. Thus, this thesis will fill the deficiency in the existing literature by exploring the Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. **Chapter three** gives an overview of the methodology I employed for this thesis. **Chapter four** analyzes recent developments in Bangladesh–India trade relations from the collected data. **Chapter five** investigates the security aspect of the bilateral ties between Bangladesh and India. Finally, **chapter six** concludes by providing the key findings, policy recommendations, and the scope for further research.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research method I have applied for the thesis. I have employed a case study method, which is one of the approaches of qualitative research design. This research best fits into the case study research exploring the case of Bangladesh–India bilateral relations, given the BRI context. This chapter covers the case study method, rationale behind choosing the case study method, the detailed process of data collection, and the limitations of this thesis due to the Covid–19 pandemic.

2.1 Case Study Research

Case study research is one of the five approaches of qualitative research method. It refers to the understanding of an issue or problem by using one or more cases. The rest of the approaches are–narrative approach, phenomenological approach, grounded theory, and ethnographic research. However, amongst the five approaches, case study research is the widely used method in the disciplines of social sciences (Creswell, 2007, p.73).

According to Yin (2012, p.4), case study research helps investigate a contemporary phenomenon based on empirical inquiry. Stake (2005) reiterated that a case study is not a method; instead, it is a study choice. In a case study research, the researcher meticulously investigates an issue by using extensive data sources. Hence, this thesis uses a vast range of sources for an in–depth data collection process, including interviews, observations, audio, and video materials, documents, and reports. Thus, data in case study research covers multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2012, p. 4).

2.2 Typologies of Case Study Research

There are three case studies—the single instrumental case study, the collective or multiple case study, and the intrinsic case study. A single case study, as the name suggests, is the study based on an individual case. A single instrumental case study first figures out an issue to explore, and then the case is selected to examine the problem within the case. In contrast, multiple case study decides more than one case to analyze the issue. Collective case study research can bring a different perspective on the same problem. The intrinsic case study studies the case itself (Creswell, 2007, p.74; Stake, 1995).

2.3 The Rationale behind Choosing Case Study Method

Based on the typology of case study research, this thesis topic is appropriate for multiple case studies since it analyzed the case of Bangladesh–India bilateral relations, given the BRI context. As Stake (1995) states that like sampling research, case study research does not aim to study the same issue for other cases. Thus, this research is best fitted into the collective case study method because it integrates different perspectives from Bangladesh and India regarding BRI. The rationale behind choosing a collective case study method is to identify the impacts of BRI, particularly on Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. This thesis is a case study research as it only studies the BRI given the cases of Bangladesh and India. It does not establish a similar outcome for other bilateral relations. The thesis rejects other methods because the case study method is the detailed study of an issue. In this research, the different aspects of Bangladesh–India bilateral relations have been studied and examined given the context of BRI.

2.4 Data Collection

This research explored the possible sources of data collection tools suggested by scholars. The data collection tools, as mentioned above, include—interviews, observations, audio, and video materials, documents, and reports. I collected both primary data and secondary data. A thorough analysis of both primary and secondary resources is the basis of this research. However, to complement the existing literature, two expert interviews from Bangladesh and India were also conducted for gathering an insightful understanding of Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. The Bangladeshi expert is a professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. In contrast, the Indian expert is an associate professor of Politics and International Relations at the North–Eastern Hill University, India. The experts are renowned in their respective expertise on foreign policy and Indo–Bangladesh bilateral relations.

The questionnaire for the interviews was semi–structured. The interviews were conducted via Skype, WhatsApp, and Facebook messenger. Before the interviews, the questions were sent to the interviewees for their preparation. The discussions continued for approximately 40 minutes. The conversations were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and later were transcribed. However, the interviewees’ identities will not be enclosed in this thesis as per the ethical concern. Instead, they will be cited as interviewee “B,” referring to the expert from Bangladesh and interviewee “I,” referring to the expert from India.

For secondary data collection, scholarly works, including books, journal articles, reports, and renowned organizations’ websites were used. However, seminar and conference reports, the national dailies of Bangladesh, and India were used to collect the recent signing of agreements, state visits of government officials, opinions, and perceptions of some other experts, particularly policymakers and government officials.

2.5 Data Analysis

Scholars suggest that during qualitative data collection, researchers should analyze the data simultaneously. There are three strategies to analyze qualitative data. These are—coding and thematic analysis, narrative analysis and individual case studies, and memos and displays. Thematic analysis of qualitative data means to categorically arrange the data (Maxwell, 2009, p.236). It facilitates to rearrange similar data under some thematic areas. I used the thematic analysis strategy to analyze my data generated from both the interviews and other primary and secondary sources. For instance, I arranged all my data under the thematic areas—Bangladesh–India economic relations, Bangladesh–India security relations, the Indian Ocean, and the crux of Indo–Bangladesh bilateral relations.

2.6 Limitations

This research has been done during the Covid–19 global pandemic emergency; thus, it has faced some challenges and has some limitations. Due to the worldwide crisis, it was impossible to travel and conduct face–to–face interviews with the interviewees. Another challenge was the internet connection required for the interviews. The interrupted connection made it challenging to listen to the speeches of the interviewees and slightly hampered to transcribe the data from the recordings. Besides, it was difficult to reach some people for interviews due to the termination of the offices. Hence, one of the primary target respondents of this research, i.e., government officials and practitioners from Bangladesh and India, could not be reached due to the pandemic.

2.7 Conclusion

The qualitative method applied for this research is an in-depth analysis of Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. As a case study research, it helps understand the current changing trends in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations, given the context of China’s BRI. It also helps explore the policies that Bangladesh has been pursuing in dealing with these two Asian giants, i.e., China and India. The data collection, especially the expert interviews, contributed a lot to the analysis of this research. However, one of the significant drawbacks of this thesis is that it could not reach and interview some of the government officials either from Bangladesh or India and thus, lacks the practitioners’ perception of bilateral relations. However, secondary sources, mostly newspaper articles and conference speeches where the practitioners expressed their opinions regarding BRI and other aspects of Bangladesh–India bilateral relations helped fill the shortage.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.0 Introduction

A rigorous literature review includes books, journal articles, and other resources on the internet (Rowley and Slack, 2004, p.31). This chapter explores the existing literature on the BRI and focuses on the impacts of BRI on Southeast Asian and South Asian countries. The African nations and their interests in BRI are also briefly mentioned. However, none of the existing literature explored the impacts of BRI on any bilateral relations. Thus, this thesis argues how this research will fit into the current scholarly world and contribute to it by investigating the impacts of the BRI on Bangladesh- India bilateral relations.

3.1 Belt and Road Initiative: Revival of the Ancient Silk Road

Reflecting on the ancient Silk Road, both Lei (2018) and Xing (2019) argued in their books that the modern BRI is the revival of the Chinese old Silk Road used for trade and communication between the western and eastern part of the world. The Han Dynasty introduced the Silk Road since the 2nd Century BC for business and interaction with the western countries (Ehizuelen, 2017, p.341). After the Han Dynasty, the Sui Dynasty also explored the western area via the Silk Road. In the ancient Silk Road, three routes connected the Byzantine Empire¹, Persia, and North Brahman² via land route. It also joined the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean via the maritime route (Lei, 2018, p.24-27). Compared to the ancient Silk Road, the BRI is nothing but the modernization of the old Silk Road with the same land and sea routes. The land route of the modern BRI is known as the Silk Road Economic Belt while the sea route is known as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. However,

¹ Byzantine is the ancient name of modern Turkey.

² Today's North India.

the professor named Wang Jisi was the pioneer who stated in 2012 that China should revive its old Silk Road (Ehizuelen, 2017, p.341).

BRI is China's outward expansion, which is required to depict China's national strength and international status in global politics. The BRI also reveals China's interest in global governance to establish itself as a norm maker rather than a norm taker. However, China needs resources to fuel its national strength, and thus, BRI can help China look for support in other countries in exchange for infrastructure development (Lei, 2018, p.24, p.136; Ehizuelen, 2017, p.341). The main objective of the BRI is to promote infrastructure and connectivity by Chinese investment projects, which include—infrastructure development initiative, roads, railways, highways, building pipelines, and ports (Xing, 2019, p.6).

3.2 The New Belt and Road Initiative

The BRI is the signature project of Chinese President Xi Jinping. The BRI comprises two routes—the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The belt represents the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the road refers to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Liu and Dunford, 2016). These two routes were proposed separately by President Xi Jinping. China has also initiated the development of the “Digital Silk Road,” embedded within the BRI. The digital silk road aims to make China as a high-tech leader in terms of information technology and telecommunications equipment (Eder et al., 2019).

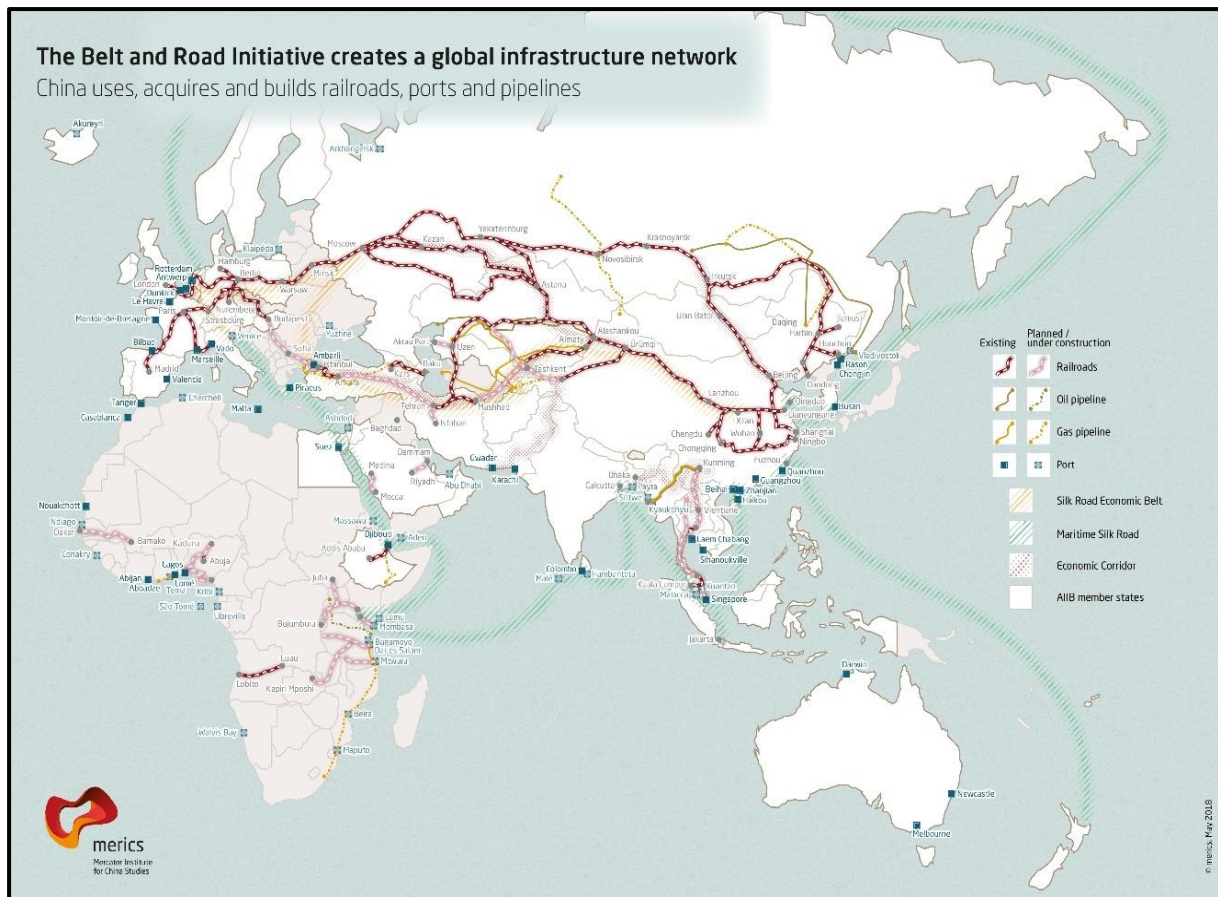


Figure 1: Map of BRI (MERICS, 2019)

3.2.1 The Silk Road Economic Belt

Xi Jinping declared the Silk Road Economic Belt during his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013 (Wang, 2016). This route aims to connect China's mainland and western provinces with the sub-regions of Asia, including Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Going through Asia, the Silk Road Economic Belt will end into the land of Europe (Xing, 2019, p.6). The Silk Road Economic Belt encompasses six international economic corridors. These are— New Eurasia Land Bridge Economic Corridor, China–Mongolia–Russia Economic Corridor, China–Central Asia–West Asia Economic Corridor, China–Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, and Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor.

3.2.2 The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

The sea-oriented route of BRI is known as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Xi Jinping announced the Maritime Silk Road in October 2013 during his visit to Indonesia. Connecting China's seaports in the South China Sea, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road starts from the Fujian province of China. It passes through the Strait of Malacca, Horn of Africa, and the Mediterranean Sea in Europe. This route also encompasses the Indian Ocean and interlinks the South China Sea to the South Pacific Ocean. Like the Silk Road Economic Belt, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road also includes various connectivity projects such as airports, railways, pipelines, and seaports (Blanchard, 2019, p.1; Wang, 2016; Xing, 2019, p.6).

3.3 BRI and Southeast Asian Countries

Arase (2015) explained the implications of the BRI for Southeast Asian countries. China wants its adjacent Asian neighbors to join the BRI by which the Asian neighbors will have an asymmetric dependence on China. He also argued that China's regional integration is different from that of the western world. While the developed countries focus on economic liberalization, the Chinese style regional integration is about economic assistance, which aims to build infrastructure and commercial corridors to facilitate trade and financial flows to or from China. The author further explained that China's community of common destiny depends on the restoration of a Sino-centric Asian order in which the Southeast Asian nations fall first.

Gong (2019) interlinked China's interest in building connectivity and economic ties with Southeast Asian countries as the first neighborhoods of its peripheral diplomacy. The author also analyzed how China can increase its influence in the Southeast Asian region under BRI's umbrella. Geographically, most of the Southeast Asian nations are either located in the South China Sea or the Indian Ocean, which are very crucial for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

Thus, the author argued that Southeast Asian nations are vital for the BRI, and China wants to secure its strategic position in this region. Some of the Southeast Asian countries perceive that the BRI projects could undermine the regional forum—the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The trade imbalance between Southeast Asian nations and China is also persistent. The significant impact of BRI is that it can increase the trade gap in the region. Hence, the BRI projects can create economic dependency on China, affecting the domestic economy of the Southeast Asian nations.

Yu (2017), Chen (2019), and Lavin (2019) also stated how vital the Southeast Asian nations for the implementation of BRI. Due to the Strait of Malacca's strategic location, the Southeast Asian region is at the core of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Southeast Asian countries also need BRI to shrink the regional infrastructure gap. Yu (2017) analyzed both the opportunities and challenges that derive from the BRI. China is the largest trading partner of Southeast Asian countries. China is also the largest export destination for these countries to export raw materials, intermediate goods, and mineral resources. As BRI primarily focuses on building connectivity, China has provided substantial financial support for several transportation projects to the Southeast Asian nations. Countries like Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia have already been constructing railways under the flagship projects of BRI. By joining BRI, the Southeast Asian nations can import the technological know-how and decrease the regional infrastructure gap. However, there are suspicious regarding China's move in the South China Sea; especially, China has ongoing tensions with the Philippines and Vietnam. These countries are concerned about the economic overdependence on China and how China can change the geopolitical order in the Southeast Asian region and beyond Asia (Yu, 2017; Lavin, 2019).

3.4 BRI and South Asian Countries

Chung (2017) analyzed the importance of South Asia for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. He stated that the South Asian countries, except India, have enthusiastically welcomed the BRI projects. By engaging with the South Asian nations, China wants to increase its presence in the Indian Ocean. South Asia is crucial for the energy supply of China from the Persian Gulf. The author argued that by establishing ports in the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region, China wants to encircle India through the “String of Pearls,” which is conceived by India as the Chinese grand strategy to constrain India’s presence in the Indian Ocean. Thus, India is suspicious regarding BRI and hesitates to join this initiative.

Haque (2018) analyzed the impacts of China’s BRI, specifically on the garment industry of Bangladesh. However, this article also slightly discussed the economic effects of BRI in Bangladesh. He stated that China has already replaced India as Bangladesh’s major import destination. China is interested in infrastructure development in Bangladesh and is establishing a coal power plant, ports, and transportation. China also allows Bangladesh duty-free access to its market. The bilateral trade between China and Bangladesh expects to reach at the peak of US\$30 billion by 2021. Recently, Bangladesh has approved to China to build a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Anowara Upazila in the Chittagong district, the port city of Bangladesh. The author also reiterated that Bangladesh could be strategically crucial for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road because of its location and the ports of Bangladesh, i.e., Chittagong and Mongla ports are vital for China’s presence in the Indian Ocean. The author wrote this article from a positive perspective, although it argues to discuss the impact of BRI on the garment sector of Bangladesh. It does not entail any adverse effects of BRI on the economy of Bangladesh.

Das (2017) posited the BRI and the South Asian dilemma. The author also warned about the Challenges for the South Asia nations. China's involvement in South Asia employing trade, commerce, infrastructure development, investment has been increasing. Thus, this is one of the main concerns of India as it perceives BRI from a geostrategic point of view. The author argued that the joining of India in BRI could even maximize the connectivity of the South Asian countries (Das, 2017, p. 130-134).

Papatheologou (2019) analyzed that South Asian nations perceive a win-win situation. She also argues about the infrastructure need of South Asia and how BRI can improve the connectivity of the region. Like Das (2017), she also stated India's concern regarding its sovereignty and why India does not want to join this Chinese initiative. The author also explained briefly about the concept of Indo Pacific Strategy (ISP), Free and Open Indo Pacific (FOIP), and the presence of the other regional powers in the Indian Ocean region.

Singh (2019) also articulated the geostrategic importance of South Asia for China as it is the intersection of the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Consequently, China still wants to pursue its BRI projects with all the South Asian nations. Bangladesh has become a vital hub for China as it participated in both the routes of the BRI. The author also pointed out the importance of other South Asian countries to China.

3.5 BRI and Africa

Although the African nations and their involvement with the BRI are not the focus of this thesis, however, the existing literature on BRI and Africa indirectly matters to understand the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India. Chen (2016), ZiroMwatela (2016), and Changfeng (2016) argued that BRI could reduce the infrastructure gap in Africa. ZiroMwatela and Changfeng (2016) scrutinized the importance of Africa to China from a global geopolitical

lens. The authors also focused on issues such as debt–trap policy and economic overdependence.

The impacts of BRI on the African nations are essential to understand the Bangladesh–India bilateral relations and the South Asian context. All the African countries have willingly joined the BRI projects financed by China. However, given the context of South Asia, except for India, the rest of the South Asian nations have positively welcomed the BRI. The issues discussed in the African context all apply to South Asia. The literature on BRI and Africa does not discuss Asia–Africa–Growth–Corridor, which is being developed by India and Japan as an alternative to the BRI.

3.6 Conclusion

From the existing scholarship on BRI and its implications for Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa, this chapter found that most of the literature discusses how China wants to pursue its geopolitical interests via the two routes of the BRI. The current research has also covered other issues such as—debt–trap, economic overdependence on China, a possible burgeoning of regional tensions, and a negative impact on the domestic economy. However, the existing scholarship addressed those issues in a regional context. The literature on BRI and South Asia also explores the challenges and opportunities and overall implications of BRI from a regional context. Nonetheless, BRI can also influence a long–standing bilateral relation such between Bangladesh and India. Thus, the main aim of this thesis is to study the recent trends in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations in the context of BRI.

CHAPTER 4: BANGLADESH–INDIA ECONOMIC RELATIONS

4.0 Introduction

After Bangladesh joined the BRI, some topical trends have occurred in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. For instance, India’s growing monetary assistance for infrastructure development in Bangladesh has been rising. The import and export of these two countries have also been increasing. This chapter analyzes the recent trends in Bangladesh–India trade relations. The section constructed the analysis by incorporating the experts’ opinions from the interviews and other sources.

4.1 Bangladesh and the BRI

During the state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Bangladesh in 2016, Bangladesh formally joined the BRI by signing an MoU, and the countries signed 27 deals worth US\$4.5 billion (Hossain, 2019). After this deal, Bangladesh has become the second-largest Chinese investment recipient in South Asia (Ramachandran, 2019). The perception of Bangladesh regarding BRI is very positive. The reason behind Bangladesh’s positive attitude towards the BRI is that Bangladesh needs the know–how to develop its infrastructure, and China is filling up the gap. Hence, Bangladesh’s joining to the BRI is nothing but a soft joining from Bangladesh’s side. Bangladesh’s burgeoning economy has attracted Chinese investment in Bangladesh (Professor, International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, May 2020). According to the World Bank (WB), Bangladesh is the fastest growing economy in South Asia and 2019, Bangladesh has already achieved 8% growth rate in 2019–20 fiscal year surpassing India with 7% growth rate (The Daily Star, 2019).

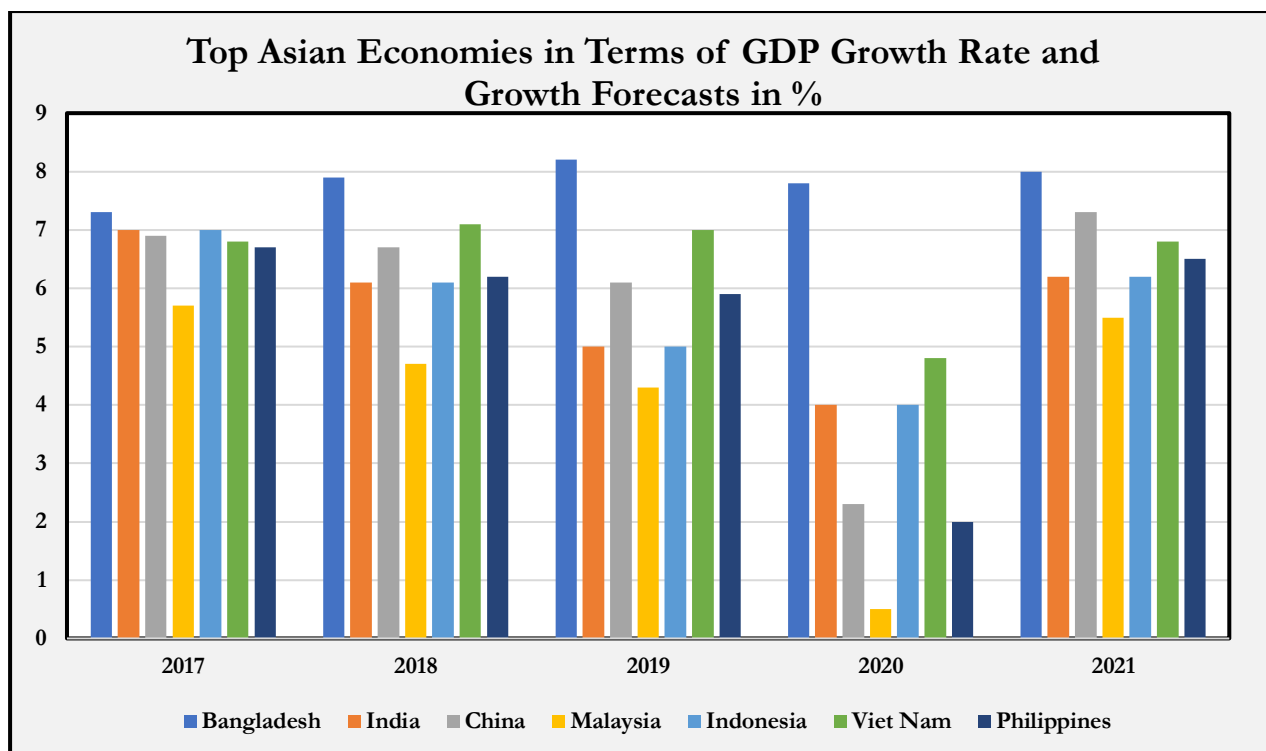


Figure 2: Growth Rate of Asian Economies (Figure: Author, Data: ADB, 2020)

The figure depicts the consistency in the GDP growth rate of Bangladesh. It predicts that the GDP growth rate of Bangladesh in the upcoming years will be between 7% to 8% while the other economic powers of Asia will be facing significant oscillation. In 2018, for the first time, Bangladesh achieved all the three criteria to come out from the list of Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Bangladesh also expects to become a developing country by 2024 (World Bank, 2020; Karim, 2019). Thus, this rapidly increasing economy of Bangladesh needs fuel and investment to run its economy smoothly, and this is where China has been investing for the last few years.

Compared to Bangladesh, India lags the growth rate of Bangladesh. Aside from this, the demand for energy sectors and infrastructure development is highly increasing in Bangladesh. China engages with Bangladesh in agriculture, chemicals, energy, finance, health, and every other industry (Siddique, 2019).

Since 2016, China has been investing in BRI projects in Bangladesh. To date, BRI related Chinese investment in Bangladesh accounts for US\$38 billion. The table below illustrates some of the projects. For instance, China has been investing money in the coal power plant projects of Bangladesh worth US\$21.5 billion (Ahmed, 2019). Another mega project financed by China is the Padma Bridge project, for which the Exim Bank of China has issued Bangladesh US\$3 billion. In addition to this, China is also investing in the SEZ declared by Bangladesh.

Investor	Sector	Subsector	US\$ Million
Power Construction Corp, HTG	Energy	Coal	750
Genertec	Energy	Coal	780
China Communications Construction	Other	Industry	110
Shanghai Stock Exchange, Shenzhen Stock Exchange	Finance	Investment	160
Power Construction Corp	Energy	Coal	360
Kunming Iron	Metals	Steel	2130
Sinomach	Technology	Telecom	220
China Railway Engineering	Transport	Rail	200
China Energy Engineering	Energy	Gas	210
Power Construction Corp	Transport	Shipping	1550
Tebian Electric Apparatus	Energy		1660
China Communications Construction, State Construction Engineering	Transport	Shipping	510

Table 1: BRI Projects in Bangladesh (Source: China Global Investment Tracker, 2019)

The table represents some of the projects funded by China in Bangladesh. Mostly, China has been financing the energy and the transport sectors of Bangladesh. However, China is taking the lead in financing other industries in Bangladesh. This increasing Chinese presence in Bangladesh has become a significant concern for India, and to counter it, India has also started cultivating trade relations with Bangladesh.

4.2 India Responses to the BRI

In international politics, Indo–China relations have always been on the verge of rivalry. The historical ties between these two countries were inimical. The bilateral relations between India

and China build on suspicions. India claims that the BRI violates the sovereignty of India as some of the BRI projects run over the territory claimed by India. For instance, the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) runs through Gilgit–Baltistan, the part of Pakistan administered Kashmir. As India claims the entire Kashmir as an integral part of it; hence, India seeks the projection of the CPEC as a threat to its sovereignty (Muneer et al., 2018). Thus, India rejected the BRI. Besides the sovereignty issue, India conceives the BRI as a grand strategy of China to encircle India in its vicinity or the closed neighborhood of its territory. India fears that by involving with the South Asian countries, China wants to enclose it, which India calls as the String of Pearls (Associate Professor, Politics and International Relations, India, May 2020).

4.3 Impact on Bangladesh–India Trade Relations

The bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India have been amicable. India was the largest trading partner of Bangladesh from 1972 to 2004 (Hossain, 2019, p.145). However, China replaced India as the largest trading partner of Bangladesh in 2004. Since then, China has been the largest trading partner of Bangladesh. The recent trade volume between Bangladesh and China is worth US\$18.7 billion and expects to exceed US\$30 billion by 2021 (Prothom Alo, 2019; Ramachandran, 2019). India is aware of these burgeoning trade relations between Bangladesh and China. However, this growing trade relations between Bangladesh and China have indeed increased the bilateral trade relations between Bangladesh and India. For instance, trade between Bangladesh and India has increased. Both export and import have increased between the two countries. For example, in 2019, Bangladesh exported to India worth US\$1.29 billion, which was the first time in the history of Bangladesh–India trade relations (Ovi, 2019; Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2020).

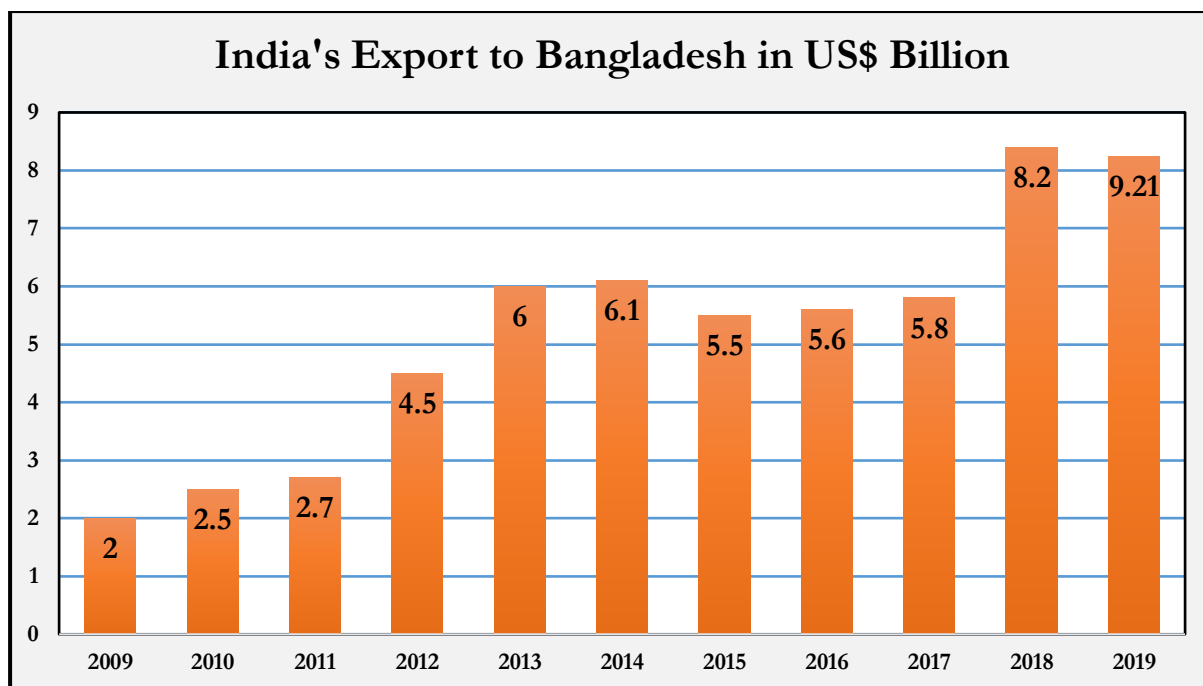


Figure 3: India's Export to Bangladesh (Figure: Author, Data: Comtrade, 2019)

In this figure, we can see that since 2016, Indian export to Bangladesh has increased rapidly compared to the previous years, and it has reached US\$9.21 billion in 2019. However, the World Bank estimates that Bangladesh–India trade relations has the potentiality to achieve worth US\$16.4 billion in every fiscal year (Rahman, 2019).

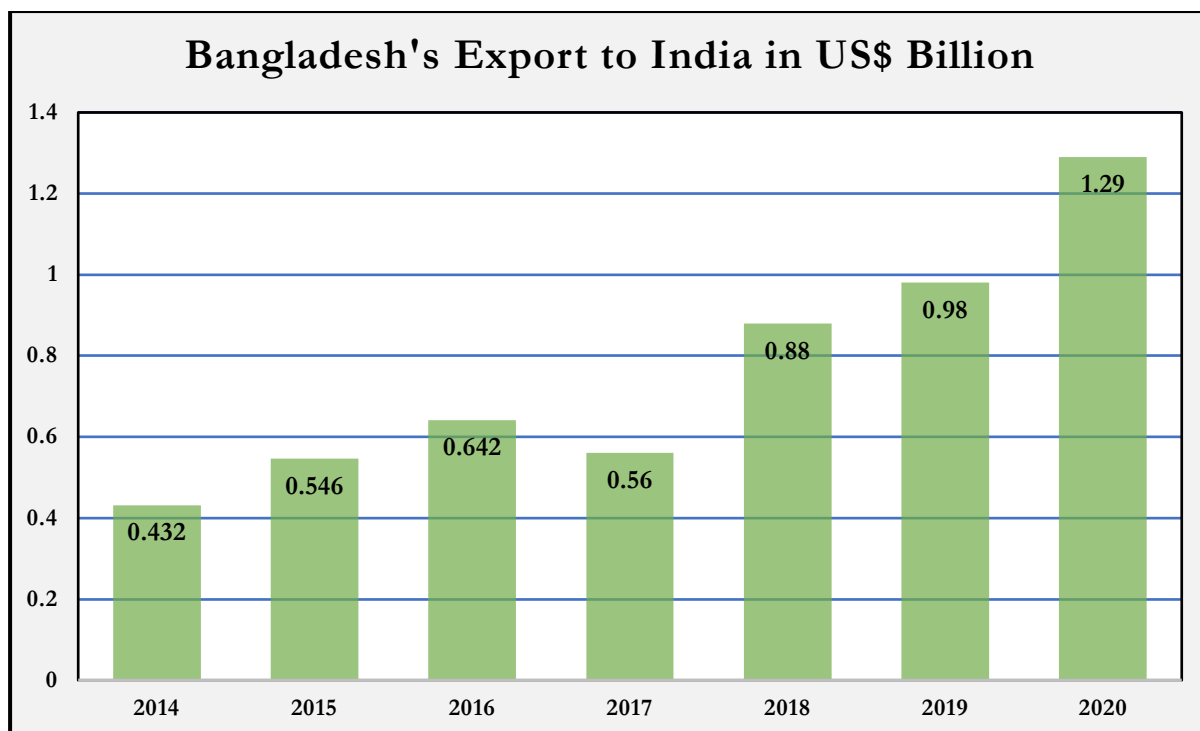


Figure 4: Bangladesh's Export to India (Figure: Author, Data: IMF, 2020)

Figure 4 shows an increase in the export of Bangladesh to India. China granted Bangladesh duty-free and quota-free access for all of Bangladesh's products since July 2010. India also started providing quota-free access to Bangladesh's products except for alcohol and tobacco (Islam, 2019; Khaled, 2018; Ovi, 2019). Consequently, this duty-free and quota-free access led to an increase in Bangladesh's export to India.

The trade volume between Bangladesh and India has increased almost five times compared to that of the year of 2005. One reason India wants to uphold the newly cultivated trade relation with Bangladesh is that China is also the largest trading partner of India. India has its trade with China worth US\$90 billion and anticipates reaching US\$402 billion by 2020 (Hossain, 2019, p. 145). Hence, considering all these economic aspects, India is now willing to upgrade the trade relations with Bangladesh to counter the Chinese influence in its immediate neighbor.

4.4 Development Partnership

China is also the largest trading partner of India. Despite the fact, India will try to nudge Bangladesh not to be inclined to China. India will try its best to prevent Bangladesh's inclination towards China, and India has been doing so for the last few years. For instance, India is creating alternative sources of investment for Bangladesh. India is also offering money to Bangladesh. India has already declared a line of credit worth US\$8 billion for Bangladesh. Hence, this declaration of such a vast amount of loan can be taken as a reflection because of Bangladesh's joining to the BRI so that Bangladesh will not become dependent on China. (Interviewee B, op. cit.). Today, Bangladesh has become the most prominent development partner of India and is the largest recipient of the line of credits. During the state visit of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India in 2017, these two neighboring countries signed the line of credit along with 35 deals accounting US\$14.5 billion (Hossain, 2019, p.145; Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2020).

Hence, considering these newly increased trade relations between Bangladesh and India, it is worth mentioning that India has started offering a more liberal economic and trade approach to Bangladesh. The increased amount of the line of credit is a good example here. India increased the amount of line of credit to US\$8 billion right after Bangladesh joined the BRI in 2016. Thus, Bangladesh's joining of the BRI has made India rethink the trade relations with Bangladesh and led it to offer Bangladesh more liberal trade relations. Henceforth, the bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh will not be unsettled; instead, there is a high chance for further increasing.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the recent developments in Bangladesh–India trade relations. The analysis found that since 2016, the trade volume between Bangladesh and India has highly increased. India’s economic assistance to Bangladesh has also increased. India is keen to offer more financial support to Bangladesh for infrastructural development. India takes this liberal approach towards Bangladesh to counter Chinese influence in Bangladesh. Considering India’s current policies towards Bangladesh, future Bangladesh–India trade relations can build upon steady cooperation of financial flow, investment flow, and efficient trade volume.

CHAPTER 5: BANGLADESH–INDIA SECURITY RELATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter investigates the recent trends in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations based on security. The chapter explores the recent changes that have occurred in the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India. The section finds that moving away from the hard power projection, India is now persuading Bangladesh with soft power to deepen the security relations between the two countries.

5.1 Defense Cooperation between Bangladesh and China

In South Asia, only Bangladesh has a defense cooperation agreement with China. The “Bangladesh–China Defense Cooperation Agreement” was signed in 2002 (Kapila, 2003). After this defense cooperation, Bangladesh is now the second largest importer of Chinese arms and equipment (Yesmin, 2018). Under this cooperation, both China and Bangladesh train their military personnel in their respective defense academies (Ramachandran, 2019; Uddin and Bhuiyan, 2011, p.11). China also built the sole arms factory of Bangladesh based in Joydebpur, Dhaka. Since the signing of the defense cooperation agreement, Bangladesh has been purchasing military equipment and weaponry for the army officers (Bhattacharjee, 2018; Uddin and Bhuiyan, 2011, p. 11).

Before China, Bangladesh had a formally signed 25 years security alliance treaty only with India from 1972 to 1997. Conversely, Bangladesh did not renew the agreement with India. India is also aware that China is the largest provider of arms, particularly small arms to Bangladesh. In contrast to the security alliance with India, defense cooperation with China is

based only on purchasing military weapons. (Interviewee B, op. cit.). The reasons behind Bangladesh's purchasing military arms from China are as follows—

First, China has been a prominent source to modernize the armed forces of Bangladesh. Bangladesh tends to depend on China for the modernization of its armed forces because of the cheap military weapons (Mannan, 2018, p. 6; Uddin and Bhuiyan, 2011, p. 22).

Second, the military weapons provided by China are not just cheap, but high-quality hardware and easy to use (Bhaumik, 2017).

Finally, military officials claim that the Indian weapons are low-quality hardware. Besides this, India itself is the second largest importer of arms from other countries (The Hindu, 2019). In addition to this, Bangladesh wants to modernize its army because of the increasing non-traditional security issues, i.e., terrorism, and piracy within its territory so it can combat intra-states issues effectively (Interviewee B, op. cit.).

5.2 How Has India Been Reacting?

India has been very prudent regarding Bangladesh–China military cooperation. India shares its Northeastern borders with Bangladesh, and there are allegations that Chinese arms back the insurgent groups of Northeast India. China provided weapons to the Maoist insurgent groups' during the 1960s. Hence, being a communist country, China wanted to spread its ideology to its periphery (Morris, 2011). Thus, India does not want to see the presence of Chinese arms in Bangladesh persuaded by the sovereignty issue. India fears that China's achievements of the BRI can undoubtedly increase the insurgency within India's neighborhood spheres (Interviewee I, op. cit.). India even employed diplomatic maneuver by showing hard power when Bangladesh started extensive military cooperation with China. For instance, India arduously reacted when Bangladesh procured two submarines from China in 2016 to upgrade

the navy (The Daily Star, 2017). India coercively questioned why Bangladesh needed to purchase submarines from China (Bhaumik, 2017).

Consequently, India did not take Bangladesh's military ties with China amiably. However, India and Bangladesh's security perception are different in the sense that India's perception of threat is more global and regional. In contrast, the threat perception of Bangladesh is more intra-state. India needs to consider this threat perception of Bangladesh that it is nothing towards India. However, India will still be using diplomatic maneuver towards Bangladesh not to be in line with China overwhelmingly (Interviewee B, op. cit.).

5.3 India's Propositions to Bangladesh

After much of hard power projection, India tried to convince Bangladesh to sign a 25-year comprehensive defense pact with India, including training of military personnel, selling military hardware and equipment (The Daily Star, 2017). However, Bangladesh did not show interest in signing any formal defense pact with India. In contrast, Bangladesh put forward the proposition of signing an MoU on defense cooperation and finally signed the MoU with India in April 2017 (Hossain, 2019, p. 146). Except for China, Bangladesh has military cooperation relations with other countries. For instance, in 2013, Bangladesh signed arms purchasing deal with Russia worth US\$1 billion (The Daily Star, 2013). Even Bangladesh has a security dialogue with the USA. Knowing these security ties of Bangladesh with other countries, India even willingly offered Bangladesh US\$500 million worth line of credit for the procurement of military hardware (Hossain, 2019, p. 146; Bhaumik, 2017). India began to persuade Bangladesh since 2016 after Bangladesh joined the BRI.

5.4 Indian Ocean: Crux of Bangladesh–India Bilateral Relations

The Indian Ocean region is an integral part of the BRI. Bangladesh is a littoral state of the Indian Ocean. As China's 21st Maritime Silk Road passes via the Indian Ocean, along with India, other global powers, i.e., Japan, Australia, and the USA, are aware of the increasing Chinese presence in the region. Regarding Bangladesh–India relations, both the countries had a maritime dispute in the Bay of Bengal for the last four decades (Hossain, 2019, p. 139). Failing to resolve the issue bilaterally owing to India's reluctance, On October 08, 2009, Bangladesh referred this issue to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) under the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). After running for five years, finally, in 2014, the PCA pronounced the verdict in favor of Bangladesh. The tribunal awarded Bangladesh 19,467 km² of the 25,602 km² sea area of the Bay of Bengal (The Hindu, 2014; Hossain, 2019, p. 139). This landmark victory for Bangladesh against India's reluctant policy urged India to settle disputes bilaterally.

Since 2013, new concepts have been evolving within the Indian Ocean region to respond to the BRI. For instance, Japan proclaimed the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG–B) in 2014. Bangladesh is the center of this belt (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2014). Japan also conceptualized the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor in 2016 based on Indo Pacific Strategy (ISP) (Basu, 2017). This growth corridor tends to be an alternative to the BRI. However, despite being part of the BRI, Bangladesh is not excluded from this belt and growth corridor. There is less possibility that these initiatives will undermine the Indo–Bangladesh or Japan–Bangladesh bilateral relations. With both India and Japan, Bangladesh has infrastructure–related projects. Bangladesh is connected to the alternative growth corridor and considered as the hub of the region (Interviewee I, op. cit.).

5.4.1 Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B)

Bangladesh is at the center of Big-B. Japan initiated this growth belt to accelerate the economic cooperation between Bangladesh and Japan. Japan–Bangladesh bilateral relations have always been amicable. Japan emphasizes the geostrategic location of Bangladesh, stating Bangladesh as a “gateway” for both South Asia and Southeast Asia. Having Bangladesh as the center of the belt can help Japan reshape itself as a sparkling trading nation that deeply incorporates into inter-regional and global value chains (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2014).

5.4.2 Asia–Africa Growth Corridor

Bangladesh is also a part of the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor. The Asia–Africa Growth Corridor offers an alternative to the BRI (Brînză, 2018). During the 52nd Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank (AfDB) held in India in 2017, India and Japan officially declared the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor (Nair, 2017). The Asia–Africa Growth Corridor is crucial for another catchphrase—the Free and Open Indo–Pacific (FOIP) region. This growth corridor aims to rediscover the ancient sea–routes, which will connect Africa to the Indian Ocean, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (Panda, 2017). Thus, creating new concepts such as—ISP, FOIP, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), also known as the quad, the other global powers in the Indian Ocean region, i.e., India, China, Japan, the USA, and Australia want to dominate in the area. However, India and Japan cannot fulfill the infrastructural needs of these littoral countries. Hence, these countries are keeping surveillance on China by all these new ideas. The regional powers will need the coastal states of the Indian Ocean to alternate the Chinese presence and the BRI.

Regarding Bangladesh and its ties with the regional powers, Bangladesh has strong relations with all these countries. Thus, Bangladesh is in a position not to lose anything except if Bangladesh takes a policy of putting all eggs in one bucket (Interviewee B, op. cit.).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has critically analyzed the recent changing trends in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations in terms of security and the Indian Ocean region, given the BRI context. Since Bangladesh has joined BRI, India has changed its power projection to Bangladesh from hard power to soft power. It is a diplomatic endeavor of India to put pressure on Bangladesh not to be inclined to China. Bangladesh’s pragmatism and maturity are essential to deal with its counterparts. Bangladesh has no aggressive foreign policy towards any country. Hence, there will be no adverse effect of BRI on the recent Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. It can even deepen the future Indo–Bangladesh bilateral relations.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.0 Introduction

This thesis has examined the recent trends in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations in terms of trade and security. Framing Bangladesh–India bilateral relations in the context of the BRI, this thesis finds that since 2016, not only the relations between Bangladesh and China have developed, but also the ties between Bangladesh and India have advanced to some extent. China’s emerging status and soft power projection have nudged India to avoid using hard power towards its neighboring country. India is also trying to persuade Bangladesh through soft power, such as providing financial assistance and proposing defense pact. The BRI has brought some constructive changes in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations.

6.1 Study Outcome and Key Findings

This thesis finds that recent Bangladesh–India bilateral relations are walking on a path of closer understanding and cooperation. Instead of employing hard powers, India is now taking a lenient approach in dealing with Bangladesh. Based on the empirical evidence, this thesis shows the rising trade volume between Bangladesh and India. Two–way trade between the countries has also increased. For the first time, Bangladesh’s export to India reached US\$1.29 billion in 2019, while India’s export to Bangladesh touched US\$9.21 billion. India willingly gave duty–free accesses to Bangladeshi products. Although there is a trade deficit in terms of Bangladesh’s export to India, Bangladesh can reduce it if it continues to enjoy duty–free access to India in the future. India is trying to follow a soft power strategy akin to China. India is now more proactive and willing to develop further and extend the existing warm relations with Bangladesh. For instance, India is ready to provide economic assistance to Bangladesh. India

also wants to sign a security pact with Bangladesh again. Furthermore, India is eager to increase bilateral dialogues with Bangladesh. Bangladesh's pragmatist outlook and no-inclination in foreign policy formulation has made India realize that these two immediate neighbors should work closely and resolve emerging tensions bilaterally.

Economic capacity can help understand the trade relations between Bangladesh and China. Trade depends on the ability of a country. If India achieves more capacity than China, there is a possibility that India will again become the largest trading partner of Bangladesh. India was the largest trading partner of Bangladesh from 1972 till 2000. China was not able at that time. Hence, when China gained the capacity, it has become the largest trading partner of Bangladesh. Currently, China is the largest trading partner of the majority of countries in the world. Even ironically, China is the largest trading partner of India (Interviewee B, op. cit.). In addition to this, Bangladesh is fully aware of its foreign policy formulation towards other countries. For instance, building deep seaports is a significant part of the BRI projects. China tried to convince Bangladesh to construct the Sondaia deep seaport in the coastal region of Bangladesh (Ramachandra, 2019). At the same time, Japan also proposed to build another deep port at Matarbari in Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. Examining the economic viability of the proposed deep seaports, Bangladesh finally called off China's proposal and accepted the Japanese one. Bangladesh has been very pragmatic while dealing with its international counterparts.

6.2 Policy Recommendations for Bangladesh

Based on the analysis, this thesis recommends the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) the no-inclination policy and the pragmatist outlook policy. The no-inclination policy derives from the Bangladesh foreign policy slogan of "Friendship to all, malice to none." The pragmatist outlook policy a revised version of the foreign policy dictum helping Bangladesh avoid

inclination. From the analysis, the thesis also found that India's current policy towards Bangladesh is a liberal one, which makes it realize to develop bilateral relations with its immediate neighbor, Bangladesh. Thus, it depends more on Bangladesh how it will deal with its counterparts, i.e., China and India.

6.2.1 No-Inclination Policy

Bangladesh follows the dictum of "Friendship to all, malice to none" in its foreign policy, refusing singularity. Hence, an inclination to any single country does not exist in Bangladesh's foreign policy. Even in the cold war period, Bangladesh pursued the policy of joining the Non-Aligned-Movement (NAM). It refused to be a cliental state between the USA and the Soviet Union pole. Thus, Bangladesh does not project itself to be inclined to any country. Instead, Bangladesh takes a pragmatic approach and makes timely decisions based on viability. Despite the increasing trade relations with China, Bangladesh made an exemplary decision not to go with the Chinese proposition of the Sonaida deep seaport; instead, Bangladesh went for Japan's proposal having the old faith in Japanese technology and economic feasibility. Both the expert interviewees from Bangladesh and India recommended this no-inclination policy for Bangladesh. They mentioned the risk factors of BRI, such as the debt-trap, over economic dependence, and suggested that the policymakers of Bangladesh should not put all the eggs in the same bucket. Hence, the GoB should follow its existing policy of having friendly and no-inclined relations to its counterparts.

6.2.2 Pragmatist Outlook Policy

Hossain (2019) states that "pragmatist outlook is an attempt to avoid bandwagoning and a trap of being a cliental state." Thus, by the pragmatist outlook in policymaking, Bangladesh has become even more confident in dealing with such giant countries like India and China. Hence,

Bangladesh does not pursue a foreign policy that makes it look like to be inclined to any specific country. With its old foreign policy motto, the pragmatist outlook of foreign policy has made it easier for Bangladesh to maintain peaceful relations and coexistence with other countries. By pursuing a pragmatist outlook in foreign policy formulations, Bangladesh was able to give India a nudge to develop bilateral relations between the two countries further. India has been trying to convince Bangladesh in terms of security and the signing of the strategic alliance pact. Thus, Bangladesh should follow and formulate its foreign policies based on pragmatism and no-inclination.

6.3 Scope for Further Research

This thesis has explored Bangladesh–India relations from the BRI context and provides a solid groundwork for future research on Bangladesh–India bilateral relations. It has investigated two significant aspects of Bangladesh–India bilateral relations, i.e., trade and security. Based on the empirical evidence, this research has established that some progressive changes have occurred in Bangladesh–India bilateral relations in terms of economy and security. This thesis ascertains that the persisting speculation regarding China’s BRI and the destabilization of Bangladesh–India bilateral relations is not happening. Instead, Bangladesh and India, the immediate neighbors, are now comprehending warm ties with each other.

The thesis was written during the Covid–19 global emergencies. Hence, further research can inquiry about the impact of coronavirus on the worldwide economy, focusing on comparative case studies. The ripple effect of coronavirus will impact future bilateral relations, including the BRI and its investments. Bangladesh and India being the largest trading partner of China, have to deal with this reality. However, China will still prioritize the BRI on its national agenda (David et al., 2020).

The significant impact of Covid–19 on the global economy, manufacturing, movement of people, and goods will affect the future bilateral relations with China. This global pandemic has already brought into the light of the fragile health care systems of most of the countries. Bangladesh and India are amongst them. With a weak health care system, how these developing countries can sustain their economies will be a massive debate in future research. Vinokurov (2020) states that China will be in shortage to finance the BRI projects in its partner countries. Will bilateral relations be changing? Will China be able to uphold its position in global politics? These questions need to be the focus of future research.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questionnaire

1. What can be the significant implications or influences of BRI for South Asia?
2. What are the implications or influences of BRI for India and Bangladesh?
3. How is India reacting to this BRI?
4. How can the BRI affect the Bangladesh–India bilateral relations?
5. How can BRI influence the foreign policy formulation of Bangladesh towards India?
6. What are the risk factors of BRI for a country like Bangladesh?
7. China has already surpassed India as the largest trading partner of Bangladesh. How can it affect the Bangladesh–India relation?
8. India is also developing an alternative corridor named the Asia Africa Growth Corridor with the partnership of Japan. What will be the consequences for Bangladesh?
9. Bangladesh is now the second largest importer of Chinese arms. India does not warmly welcome this security and military tie between Bangladesh and China. How can BRI increase regional tension?
10. Is BRI important for Bangladesh to reshape its foreign policy towards India?
11. Bangladesh is a littoral state of the Bay of Bengal, which is a part of the Indian Ocean. China is also developing the ports of Bangladesh. How can China’s growing presence in Bangladesh affect the bilateral relation between Bangladesh and India?