



## Land Boundary Agreement : A Critique of Indo-Bangladesh Issue

*This Article investigates the present critique, instead of barely focusing upon the problem concerning the border issue, involves a reminiscence of the liberation of Bangladesh in order to make the readers feel how selfless involvement in the process has no meaning for a peaceful co-existence.*

**DR. AJAY KUMAR CHANDRAKAR\* & MISS RAJANI CHAUHAN\*\***

### Introduction :

India's leading role in the liberation of Bangladesh and the great sacrifice made by its people for securing to the people of Bangladesh their freedom and rights was admirable. The historic and unparalleled sacrifices made by the people of India, and to material and moral support they gave to the people of Bangladesh combined together to provide a solid foundation for the development of warm and highly friendly and co-operative relations between India and Bangladesh.

Subsequently, exchange of visits by the dignitaries of both the neighbouring countries was effected to cement the relationship; but problems arose due to the border issue.

In order to sort out problems concerning the land-boundary attempts were made in 1974. That Delhi Agreement was reached between India and Bangladesh and the problem of enclaves was solved. But in the post Mujib era the government of Bangladesh once again tried to activate the border problem with India.

Among the international boundaries India and Bangladesh share the largest land boundary of 4096 km with its neighbours, covering West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram. On this boundary some 50,000-100,000 people reside in so called Chitmahals or Indo-Bangladeshi enclaves. There are 102 Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh and 71 Bangladeshi ones inside India. Inside those enclaves there are also 28 counter-enclaves and one counter-counter-enclave, called DahalaKhagrabari. Due to contiguous borders the two countries have disputes over territories and shared water bodies the ambiguity has led the life of the residents of these enclaves to misery. They

are unable to get the basic government services because they are isolated from their own country by strips of foreign land. This issue was pending ever since Bangladesh got birth.

Most of the border related disputes have been existing since the partition of India in 1947. After liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 the two countries have made attempts to resolve border disputes but with limited success. For the first time a vision to solve this issue had been enshrined in the Indira-Mujib pact of 1972. Accordingly, the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement was signed between the two countries as it involved exchange of the territories.

According to the 1974 Agreement signed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, India and Bangladesh were to hand over the sovereignty of South Berubari and Teen Bigha Corridor (178x85 sq. metres) to each other respectively. Bangladesh handed over the sovereignty by South Berubari to India in 1974, but India was not able to reciprocate because of pressures from domestic stake-holders in its regional policy. Instead of handing over Teen Bigha Corridor to Bangladesh India gave it on lease. The Agreement also included the exchange of enclaves, involving 51,000 spread over 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India.

Attempts from time to time were not able to bring about any permanent solution to the problem.

In spite of all attempts the demands of Bangladesh continued, which could hardly be fulfilled. The issue of illegal migrants has been a constant irritant for India and Bangladesh. It is difficult to calculate or estimate the exact number of Bangladeshi migrants in India. According to an estimate, the number is between 15 to 20 million, with about

\*Research Guide, Durga College, Raipur (Chhattisgarh) \*\*Research Scholar

six million in Assam. Their presence has been the cause of ethnic and communal violence in Assam.

The detailed history of the Land Boundary Agreement being beyond the scope of this treatise, it is worthwhile to focus on the recent developments.

In order to operationalize the historic Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between both the nations India and Bangladesh have signed pact during the Indian Prime Minister NarendraModi's maiden visit to Bangladesh. In this regard the two sides swapped instruments of ratification regarding the LBA. The operationalization of LBA paves the way for exchange of 162 enclaves under the control of either countries as per the 1974 pact. The LBA, which was passed unanimously by the parliament, concerns the transfer of 111 border enclaves to Bangladesh in exchange for 51 that will become part of India.

The historic agreement settles the Land Boundary dispute which dates back to colonial times as India transfers 111 enclaves to Bangladesh in exchange for 51 enclaves. Besides it settles the question of citizenship for over 50,000 people in these enclaves.

Apart from this, Prime Minister NarendraModi announce a fresh line of credit of 2 billion dollars to Bangladesh. Both the nations also signed 22 agreements including the ones on cooperation in maritime safety and agreements to curb human trafficking and fake Indian currency.

Prime Minister NarendraModi and his Bangladeshi counterpart SeikhHasina also flagged off the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala bus service making a historic moment in the bilateral relations between the two countries.

On 7th May, 2015 the 119th Amendment Bill of the constitution was passed by the Parliament of India. Accordingly India gains 510 acres of land while ten thousand acres of land notionally go to Bangladesh. However these enclaves are remote and inaccessible. The legislation will redraw India's boundary with Bangladesh by exchanging enclaves in Assam, West Bengal, Tripura and Meghalaya.

The implications of the Agreement may be summed up as follows :

(1) It will secure the long stranded boundary and enable to curb the illegal migration, smuggling and criminal acts across the border.

(2) It would help those stateless citizens by granting the citizenship from their respective countries.

(3) It would help settle the boundary dispute at several points in Meghalaya, Tripura, Assam and West Bengal.

(4) It would improve the access to the underdeveloped, north-eastern state and would further enhance the developmental works in the region.

(5) It would help to increase the connectivity with the south-east Asia as part of India's North-eastern policy.

All these could be achieved with the active support from Bangladesh. LBA and the Teesta Water Agreement are the two major setbacks for future co-operation,

development and trade in the region and would damage India's short and long-term national and security interest.

Yet insinuations lurk and the dream for permanent solution to the problem may take ages to materialize. Illegal infiltration goes on day and night, about which the government of Bangladesh is hardly strict. Bangladeshis enter Odisha in the plea of fishing and settle wherever they find space. Mere LBA being inadequate for the outstanding problem an Infiltration Prohibition Agreement (IPA) may be passed by the parliaments of both the countries.

#### **References :**

(1) Ghai, U.R. (2004) : *Foreign Policy of India*, New Academic Publishing Co, Jalandhar.

(2) Ahmed, Saleem : "India and Bangladesh Relations in the 21st century : A new Dimension", *World Focus*, Aug. 2016.

(3) TiwarySmita, Samatha M, Kumar Amit and Ranjan Amit (2014) : "Winds of Change in South Asia", *ICWA Global Review*.

(4) <https://currentaffairsgktoday.in>; "India Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement : Latest Current Affairs."

(5) <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>; "India-Bangladesh Enclaves"

(6) <https://www.mea.gov.in>; Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India, "India and Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement."

