

MoUs signed with neighbouring countries to boost connectivity, tourism

A Monitor Report

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Dhaka : Bangladesh on March 26 marked the golden jubilee of independence - a huge milestone that was celebrated countrywide and was also paid tribute internationally. Together with the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - the country observed grand celebrations for days.

All the premiers of the neighbouring countries took part in the celebrations and signed several MoUs to further boost connectivity, trade and tourism with Bangladesh, which is said to lead to a new era of development and regional cooperation for Bangladesh and the neighbouring countries.

Bangladesh-India

The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 26 took part in the celebrations of Mujib Borsho and the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence. The visiting Indian PM sat with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on March 27 evening to discuss the future course of action that can take the ties between the two countries to new dimensions.

At the bilateral meeting at the Prime Minister's Office in the capital, they prioritised robust regional connectivity for expanding trade. Modi appreciated Hasina's initiatives regarding multimodal connectivity.

Bangladesh expressed its interest to join the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project for getting connected to Southeast Asia by road. Also, it has sought greater access to Indian territory to be linked with Nepal and Bhutan and requested Delhi to approve new routes.

The two countries signed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) in the areas of disaster management, cooperation between cadet corps, trade remedial measures, ICT and sports.

He also said India will continue to work for safe, speedy and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya refugees to Myanmar from Bangladesh.

The Indian foreign secretary said Modi proposed a joint business exhibition, styled "Best of Bangladesh, Best of India," and announced 1,000 scholarships for Bangladeshi students.

Bangladesh-Bhutan

Bangladesh and Bhutan have reached a consensus to enhance connectivity and trade between the two countries, said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on March 24. He made the announcement at a press briefing at the Foreign Service Academy in the capital, following a meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Bhutanese counterpart Dr Lotay Tshering.

Tshering arrived on March 23 to join the celebrations of Mujib Borsho and golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence.

Momen said passenger trains on Chilahati-Haldibari route will be starting soon, and that route can be linked to Bhutan via India.

According to reports, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina put emphasis on constructing necessary infrastructures to reap the highest benefits from the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) signed between Bangladesh and Bhutan last year.

The Bhutanese PM requested Hasina to issue one-time multiple full-term visa for their students studying in Bangladesh. She agreed on the issue and asked the officials concerned for taking necessary steps. Some 100 Bangladeshi products will get duty-free access to Bhutan under the PTA and 34 Bhutanese products to the Bangladeshi market.

President Abdul Hamid, meanwhile, said Dhaka and Thimphu can explore new areas of cooperation, including tourism, information and communication technology, agriculture, horticulture, and fisheries, to enhance trade and investment between the two friendly countries, during Lotay Tshering's call on the president at the Bangabhaban on March 24.

Bangladesh-Nepal

During Nepalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari's visit to Bangladesh to take part in the grand celebrations of the golden jubilee of the country and Mujib Borsho, Nepal wished to immediately start the Saidpur-Biratnagar, a 20-minutes flight connecting the two countries.

According to the Nepali Ambassador in Dhaka, Bangladesh has accepted Nepal's plan, which will now be formalised and sent to the Bangladesh government for implementation.

There is a direct flight between Nepal and Bangladesh, and about 30,000 Bangladeshis are said to visit Kathmandu each year. Officials anticipate that the new air route would strengthen ties between the two countries and help Bangladesh and Nepal attract more visitors from each other.

Bangladesh and Nepal on March 22 also signed four Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) to enhance cooperation between the two countries in different areas including tourism, sanitation, cultural exchange and railways link.

Bangladesh-Sri Lanka

Dhaka and Colombo on March 20 signed six MoUs to enhance cooperation between the two countries in different areas.

The MoUs are on Cooperation for strengthening youth development between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, between Bangla Agricultural Research Council-BARC and Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy-SLCARP and between Directorate of Technical Education of Bangladesh and Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission of Sri Lanka on Exchange of Documentation on Vocational Qualifications.

The others are on Cooperation for Training of Bangladesh Nurses and Health Care Workers in Sri Lanka and on cooperation between Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies and Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies and MoU on Cultural Programmes between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka for the years 2021-2025.

The first one is signed afresh while the remaining five were renewed through the signing on March 20.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa witnessed the signing ceremony. The MoUs were signed after bilateral talks between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka that took place at the Prime Minister's Office.

Bangladesh-Maldives

Bangladesh and the Maldives have also signed four Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) on March 18 to boost cooperation between the two countries in different areas including tourism and trade. The MoUs were signed at the Prime Minister's Office in the capital in presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

The MoUs are - MoU on joint commission for comprehensive cooperation (JCC), MoU on bilateral foreign office consultations (FOC), MoU on cooperation in the field of fisheries and pelagic fishing and MoU on cultural exchange programme (CEP) for 2022-2025.

The signing ceremony was held following the bilateral talks between the two sides led by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Maldivian president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih at the PMO.

Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih arrived in Dhaka on March 17 to attend the celebrations of the birth anniversary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the golden jubilee of the country's independence.

Foreign ministry officials said Bangladesh and Maldives signed two MoUs during the visit of Maldives Foreign Minister Abdullah Shahid in February this year. One was on cooperation on training foreign services officials and the other on human resources recruitment from Bangladesh. The latest meeting against that backdrop is likely to further cement the relations.