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Modi, Hasina flag 'futuristic vision': Delhi, Dhaka set new ball rolling on economy, trade, strategic ties

Talks to begin on economic partnership; agreement on medical e-visa, expert team on Teesta, range of partnerships

Written by **Shubhajit Roy** [Follow](#)

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India and Bangladesh also signed 10 pacts as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visiting Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina held talks at Hyderabad House. (PTI)

India and Bangladesh pledged Saturday to start negotiations on a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA); decided to launch a medical e-visa facility for Bangladesh citizens; agreed to send a technical team to discuss Teesta river water-sharing and announced the opening of an Assistant High Commission in Rangpur.

These were part of a sweeping set of collaborations that New Delhi and Dhaka signed on, in as many as 10 documents, as Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and visiting Prime Minister of Bangladesh [Sheikh Hasina](#) held talks at [Hyderabad](#) House Saturday.

Four key imperatives seem to shape New Delhi's renewed strategic engagement with Dhaka in Modi's third term: health of Bangladesh's economy; addressing Bangladeshis' medical needs; expanding India's footprint while trying to check Beijing's.

Follow live updates here | Held extensive talks on defence modernisation, ways to counter terrorism, says PM Modi after bilateral discussion with Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina

The decision to start negotiations on the CEPA was taken in view of the fact that Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and India is the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh in Asia. India is Bangladesh's largest export destination in Asia, with approximately \$2 billion of Bangladeshi exports to India in FY 2022-23.

Sources said the two sides are expected to discuss steps towards more balanced trade and new opportunities for investment.

This comes when Bangladesh's economy has its challenges.

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since the [2014-15](#) pandemic but the post-pandemic recovery continues to be disrupted by high [inflation](#), a persistent balance of payments deficit, financial sector vulnerabilities, and global economic uncertainty.

The medical e-visa facility is a major step towards bringing relief to Bangladesh citizens who come to India for their medical treatment in Indian hospitals. In 2023, about 16 lakh visas were issued to people of Bangladesh and it is estimated that about 20-30 per cent of them were for the purpose of medical treatment. A medical e-visa would simplify and speed up the process.

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The decision to send an Indian technical team to explore the conservation and management of Teesta River inside Bangladesh is significant in the wake of Chinese interest in the project. The call to establish an Assistant High Commission (AHC) in Rangpur in north-west Bangladesh is an attempt to increase New Delhi's footprint in Bangladesh. This will be the fifth AHC — besides the ones in Rajshahi, Khulna, Chittagong and Sylhet. An AHC is a mid-size diplomatic establishment, in size and scale between an embassy and a consulate.

After the meeting between the two leaders, Indian and Bangladesh officials signed seven documents on digital partnership, green partnership, maritime cooperation and blue economy, space cooperation, railway connectivity, oceanography, defence and strategic operation studies, and renewed three pacts on health and medicine, disaster management and fisheries.

“I am confident that together we will realise the goals of Viksit Bharat 2047 and Smart Bangladesh,” Modi said, after the pacts were signed adding that both sides had kept their focus on “connectivity, commerce and collaboration”. Echoing this,

outlined the future course of action, to ensure a vibrant Bangladesh by 2047.

Vision 2041 and Viksit Bharat by 2047.”

Modi said they held detailed discussions on strengthening defence cooperation — from defence production to modernisation of armed forces. He said that they also agreed to strengthen cooperation on counter-terrorism, countering radicalisation and peaceful management of the borders.

Flagging talks on CEPA, Modi said: “Today we have prepared a futuristic vision for cooperation in new areas. The youth of both the countries will benefit from the consensus reached on cooperation in areas such as green partnership, digital partnership, blue economy and space.”

Hasina described India as a “major neighbour, trusted friend and regional partner” and underlined that Bangladesh “greatly values our relations with India, which were born out of the War of Liberation in 1971.”

“I recall with gratitude the contribution of the government and the people of India to Bangladesh’s independence,” she said. She also paid homage to the “brave fallen heroes of India” who sacrificed their lives in the 1971 war.

Today’s talks come less than two weeks after Hasina came to New Delhi for the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Modi and the Union Council of Ministers.

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the post-pandemic economic recovery. Her New Delhi outreach on economic cooperation is part of her strategy to leverage the bilateral relationship to address these challenges. With Beijing's shadow in the background, New Delhi too is walking the extra mile.

This is the first incoming bilateral State visit by a foreign leader after the formation of the new government following the Lok Sabha elections.

Hasina met President [Droupadi Murmu](#), Vice President [Jagdeep Dhankhar](#) and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during her stay. In the morning, she visited Rajghat and paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi. Ahead of the talks, the visiting leader was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

On the voices of anti-India campaign in Bangladesh, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said at a briefing: "We need to work together as much as possible to essentially project correct narrative of the relationship to the people of the two countries... We do this because our relationship is historic... time-tested, deep rooted, and it is important for people to realise that such campaigns, which are done by (an) isolated minority of vested interests, are not factual... basically figments of imagination."



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He also said that the Rohingya issue was discussed between the two sides, as it has been discussed periodically at different levels of interaction.