



Available Online at EScience Press

## Journal of South Asian Studies

ISSN: 2307-4000 (Online), 2308-7846 (Print)

<https://esciencepress.net/journals/JSAS>

### The Rise of a New Royal Bengal Tiger under the Leadership of Sheikh Hasina: Diplomacy Perspective (2010-2021)

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#### ABSTRACT

In 2021, Bangladesh marked the 50th anniversary, the golden jubilee of its independence. In recent times, it has received extensive acclamation for its remarkably successful economic, social and diplomatic transformation. Particularly, under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina (Prime Minister of Bangladesh) the country is regarded globally as a model of remarkable progress in poverty alleviation, sustained growth and economic development, improving life expectancy, women empowerment, human development, and especially balancing diplomacy. Furthermore, she has brought dynamism to the foreign policy of the country and made a strategic shift in the country's diplomacy formulations prioritizing both India and China in the development trajectory since power acquisition for the second time in 2009. Thereby, highlighting Bangladesh's tremendous development in the last decade, this study synthesizes the findings from a series of policy analyses on the ground of diplomacy since Sheikh Hasina's arrival into power and her leadership which has helped the country to be a role model of development globally. Following a qualitative narrative approach based on existing literature, the study answered the question of how Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has extended leadership towards deepening various types of external relations and the effectiveness of its efforts to foster its economic development. The study was based on secondary materials particularly newspapers contents, previous scholarly writings, book chapters, and so on. This study primarily explores and analyses the features of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's prudent diplomacy while engaging with external stakeholders. The study also found that Hasina's foreign policy formulation emphasizes a moving forward strategy which has enabled Bangladesh to develop a positive relationship with all its South Asian neighbours while balancing the India-China rivalry in the region. It has also shown how the country achieved its national interest by utilizing major power competitions in the region under Hasina's prudent diplomacy.

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, leadership, diplomacy, foreign policy, economic growth, national interest, connectivity, bilateral relations.

#### INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Bangladesh has successfully managed to overcome the standing of an impoverished country into an economic powerhouse, but for which it had to come a long way. Since 2009, Sheikh Hasina's leadership has transformed the country into a strong, prosperous and powerful one in the region. In this regard, the country has received huge appreciation from many prominent scholars and world leaders. Amongst many, Professor Prabir De, Editor of the South Asia Economic Journal, stated that Bangladesh has emerged as a new Royal Bengal Tiger of Asia in recent years

(Mohan, 2021; Chakma, 2019). It has been proclaimed that the country has changed its global image through its steady GDP growth, although once it was tagged as a 'basket case' by Henry Kissinger (the then US president), thus, it has emerged as a future Asian Tiger (Mohan, 2021). Whereas, Hasina has continued the new form of diplomacy over the years, termed "soft diplomacy," focusing on the economy and people's livelihoods. In the meantime, the advancement of positive as well as friendly relations with all its neighbours and foreign counterparts has been an essential part of Bangladesh's overall foreign policy since early 2009 (Masud, 2016).

Likewise, under her leadership, Bangladesh believes in exercising responsible behaviours with its neighbours and reaching out to those who need their support. However, it is noteworthy that Bangladesh seeks deeper integration with its all neighbour in the region while not undermining others in recent times (Plagemann, 2021). Based on existing literature and a qualitative narrative approach, this article aims to explore Bangladesh's rapid and dramatic growth under the prudent leadership and diplomacy of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with a systematic and forward-looking approach. For this, the study also summarizes the core features of Hasina's cautious diplomacy that has fostered the development and then provides a prospective analysis of it. Likewise, the article concludes with a summary of the findings.

#### Sheikh Hasina and Emergence of a New Tiger

In 2021, Bangladesh marked the 50th anniversary popularly known as the golden jubilee of its independence which was achieved through a bloody independence war in 1971 (Mohan, 2021). Throughout the late 20th and early 21st century, the country was classified as one of the world's most destitute, conterminous with famine, disease prone and so many more, on the contrary, today it has received extensive acclamation for its remarkably successful economic, social and diplomatic transformation (Mohan, 2021; Chowdhury, 2019). Thereby, the country is about to undergo a second enlargement that would end its relative isolation and allow it to play a more substantial role in the region and beyond. Similarly, it would open new possibilities in the Indo-Pacific and beyond (Chakma, 2019). Nonetheless, its geopolitical significance has increased tremendously throughout the past decade and made it an attractive partner to all neighbouring countries (Chowdhury, 2019). While it has a vast population of around 180 million (Mohan, 2021), the Bangladeshi diaspora is growing and currently standing at about eight million. A large community in the Gulf States and the diaspora are also growing in the English-speaking world (Mohan, 2021; Chaudhury, 2019). It is also a significant contributor of peacekeepers for international peacekeeping. While it was once labelled a 'basket case' by Henry Kissinger, the last few years have seen a drastic change in the country's global image, and it is today projected as a future 'Asian Tiger.' In addition, Bangladesh overtook Pakistan with annual GDP in 2019 while overtaking India in 2020 with per capita GDP by a few dollars and became the second-

largest economy in the subcontinent (Mohan, 2021). Although there is a Covid-19 pandemic, Bangladesh has sustained its growth momentum (Plagemann, 2021). In recent years, it has shown rapid economic development with sustained high growth rates in GDP while consolidating its trajectory to graduate out of the category of least developed countries by 2026 and possibly jump into the category of 25 largest economies in the world by 2030 (Mohan, 2021; Plagemann, 2021). Furthermore, under the stewardship of Hasina, the country has transformed its complex relationship with India into a productive partnership over the last decade (Chaudhury, 2019). Thereby in recent years, the country has emerged as India's most significant neighbor in the region and therefore, it has strengthened strategic, political as well as economic ties to a greater extent (Chaudhury, 2019). Noteworthy, Bangladesh shares 94% of its land border with India. But it has turned its long frontier into a source of economic opportunity while resolving contentious bilateral issues with India (Mohan, 2021). Likewise, Hasina has worked with Indian Prime ministers Manmohan Singh as well as Narendra Modi and pressed for a grand bargain on cooperation to combat terrorism, resolution of disputes over land borders and river-water sharing, better access of Bangladeshi products to India's market, restoring trans-border connectivity (Islam, 2020). Additionally, the country has begun to take extensive interest in maritime affairs, placed at the top of the Bay of Bengal shore. Effective policies have liberated the country to look outward beyond South Asia, particularly toward the maritime realm too (Plagemann, 2021; Chaudhury, 2019). Henceforth, Hasina successfully resolved the country's sea-border disputes with both India and Myanmar and moving forward to strengthen its maritime capabilities using the fast-evolving dynamic in the Indo-Pacific that has emerged as a site for great power contestation among India, China, Japan, and the US in recent years (Anwar & Kugelman, 2021, Basu, 2020). Throughout the last decade, the country has avoided exclusive alliances while marching with the strategy of moving forward (Chaudhury, 2019). As one of the Quad members, Japan is also emerging as a key partner to develop the country's infrastructure (Basu, 2020). Nevertheless, the US also sees Bangladesh as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific, and it has begun to terminate its traditional strategic neglect of Dhaka. While the Quad nations, including India, Japan, Australia, and the US, have intensified their individual

and collective efforts to woo Bangladesh, the country has been going to build stronger ties with the US and Japan with an expectation that it would reduce excessive reliance on either India or China (Mohan, 2021). Thus, Hasina has shown extensive agency in playing on the geopolitical chessboard while taking advantage of its external environment. It has not even blindly embraced the Belt and Road Initiative or BRI of China like many other Asian countries; rather, it has sought to engage multiple partners, which has broadened similar chances in the maritime rivalry between China and the Quad (UNB, 2021; Mohan, 2021).

Behind all these achievements, the bold and visionary leadership of Hasina has played a crucial role (Masud, 2016). Her wit, nationalistic, constructive, cooperative, and peace-centric gentle diplomacy have played a vital role in formulating and executing an independent foreign policy (TBS, 2020; Chakma, 2019). Today, the country is regarded globally as a model of remarkable progress in poverty alleviation, sustained growth and economic development, improving life expectancy, women empowerment, human development, and balancing diplomacy (Anwar, 2019). Nonetheless, Bangladesh has maintained good relations with all countries, following the unique foreign policy principle of 'friendship to all, malice towards none' (Plagemann, 2021; Chaudhury, 2019). Thus, Hasina's centralized political leadership of the country is particularly adept at playing major power games, and in the meantime, the country's high as well as increasing intrinsic value to the international arena has played a vital role in Dhaka's successes in maintaining balancing diplomacy while pursuing its national interest (Islam, 2021; Anwar, 2019).

According to Sheikh Hasina, "Bangladesh has no hostility with anyone as we have been following the lesson taught by our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (first president of Bangladesh). We have ties with all neighbours and development partners (Islam, 2020; Mohan, 2021)." In addition, Bangladesh under her leadership has set a 'vision of 2041' to make the country a high-income developed, and prosperous one by 2041. The country is marching towards achieving the target under her prudent leadership and smartest diplomacy in the international arena (TBS, 2021).

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Diplomacy refers to a well-recognized process of influencing the behaviour and decisions of external

governments and people through negotiation, conversation, exchanging different goodwill gestures, gifts, and other various measures other than war or violence (Bizzarri, 2016). It is an essential means by which a state pursues the goals of its national interest, whereas foreign policy always travels on the shoulders of diplomacy. Likewise, Bangladesh has been fostering smart diplomacy under the prudent leadership of Sheikh Hasina, enabling the country to gain foreign policy goals and rapid growth (Mohan, 2021). Moreover, under the stewardship of Sheikh Hasina, the government has avoided exclusive alliances while moving with the strategy of 'going out' or going global. Hasina, a centralized political leader of the country who is particularly adept at playing major power games; the country's high and increasing intrinsic value to the international arena developed under her prudent leadership; the increasing number of major powers with economic interests primarily have played a vital role in Dhaka's successes in maintaining balancing diplomacy while pursuing its national interest (Plagemann, 2021). While analysing Sheikh Hasina's diplomatic prudence and foreign policy, it is found that ideological perspectives and leadership played a vital role. The behavior of Hasina in making foreign relations and pursuing national interests can be best explained with 'neoclassical realism,' which is an influential term in international relations. It asserts that the foreign policy formulation of a particular country takes into account the internal structures of states and the perceptions of leaders that act as central intermediaries between the decisions of actors as well as the pressures of power configurations (Rose, 1998). Moreover, relative material power also establishes the basic parameters of a country's making of foreign relations. Likewise, the behavior, beliefs, motives, decision style, strategy, and interpersonal style, particularly the leader's characteristics, are significant to explain and understand what states try to achieve in the external realm (Hermann, 2011). To Sheikh Hasina's diplomatic prudence, a combination of domestic variables and international structure is influential in making foreign relations of Bangladesh under her leadership. Furthermore, internal factors, including economic condition, ready-made garment industry along with other export-oriented industry, and security has shaped the policy orientation. Meanwhile, external factors such as the geostrategic location of Bangladesh in between

South and Southeast Asia, the importance of the Bay of Bengal, water sharing of international rivers, safe trade, and so on have a vital contributing role. Additionally, external pressures of various powerful international actors have also been considered when making relations with others.

#### METHODOLOGY

Based on the existing literature, this study aims to explore Bangladesh's dramatic growth under the prudent leadership and smartest diplomacy of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with a systematic and going global approach. For this, the study was based on a narrative approach which is a valuable investigative technique in qualitative research. This study builds on the research carried out through extensive interviews, detailed archival analysis, and media mapping. In sum, this paper's approach is both descriptive and analytical while following a qualitative narrative approach based

on existing literature.

#### DIFFERENT FEATURES OF SHEIKH HASINA'S GOING GLOBAL STRATEGY

##### Major Diplomatic Events

The country embarked on a national strategy centered on economic development while opening up to the outside world with the Movie forward strategy under the prudent leadership of Hasina since 2009 (Plagemann, 2021). Apart from technical cooperation with developed countries, including Japan, the US, and others, it has maintained prudent balancing diplomacy with China as well as India and cooperative relations with other regional actors to pursue its best national interests (Anwar & Kugelman, 2021). However, the rise of Bangladesh as a new Asian Tiger under the prudent leadership and diplomacy of Sheikh Hasina is an exceptionally insightful and unexplored case for the study of foreign policy trajectory (Mohan, 2021).

Table 1. Milestones in Sheikh Hasina's Foreign Relations making since 2009.

Month & Year	Major Diplomatic events
November 2009	Bangladesh started a crackdown against Neighboring Indian insurgent's groups who were operating activities from its territory.
January 2010	Hasina went to India following an invitation, where she conducted agreements on duty-free accesses for Bangladeshi goods; waterways as well as railway connectivity; LoC or Line of Credit amount to US\$ 1 billion for connectivity projects; transit rights to Bhutan and Nepal.
March 2010	Hasina's China visit where she acquired a declaration of 'Closer Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation', also signed an agreement over the US \$ 2.2 billion for infrastructural development.
February 2011	Agreements for the building of two Russian nuclear reactors have been inked by Bangladesh.
June 2011	Bangladesh successfully achieved the cancelation declaration of all pre-2008 debt of China.
September 2011	Any Indian prime minister's visit to Bangladesh after 12 years; Bangladesh was near success but, Mamata Bannerjee's (Chief Minister of West Bengal) last-minute objections prevented them from agreeing on water sharing and land boundary agreements.
January 2013	First-time visit to Russia by any Bangladeshi Prime Minister since 1972; Russia provided a loan of more than US \$ 1 billion for military purchases and others.
May & September 2014	Hasina's visit to Japan was followed by Japanese Prime Minister Abe's visit to Dhaka, where both leaders declared 'Japan Bangladesh Comprehensive Partnership; declaration of 'Big-B initiative and nearly US\$ 6 billion ODA loans by Japan.
June 2014	Hasina's China visit.
Early 2015	The US, Japan, and particularly India's pressured to abandon the Chinese development of the Sonadia deep seaport, and finally, they became successful. On the other hand, JICA's largest loan for building Matarbari deep seaport.
June 2015	During Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh, Hasina was successful in securing the \$3 billion Line of Credit and particularly signing the long-awaited India-Bangladesh Land Border Agreement.
October 2016	China's President Xi Jinping's landmark visit to Bangladesh where the country has signed agreements over US\$24 billion for twenty-seven development projects.
March 2017	Bangladesh Navy received two Chinese Ming-class submarines.
April 2017	During Hasina's visit to India, both countries inked 22 agreements in the fields of cyber security,

	nuclear energy, and defense. Moreover, India's extension of 2 LoCs includes US\$ 4.5 billion for development and infrastructure projects.
June 2017	Bangladesh was given a credit package worth US\$1.6 billion from Japan for a coal power plant, and a rapid transit system in Dhaka, among other things.
August 2017	Myanmar's crackdown on its Muslim Rohingya ethnic group and around 1 million Rohingya sought shelter in Bangladesh and Hasina agreed to shelter those people on humanitarian grounds.
March 2018	Bangladesh has signed the Tripartite pact for civil nuclear cooperation with Russia and India.
May 2019	Hasina's Japan visits where she signed agreements over a loan of around US\$205 billion for 5 projects.
August 2020	Bangladesh successfully got access to tariff-free exports for 97% of products to China; it's a major diplomatic victory; China declared US\$1 billion for the implementation of the 'Teesta River Comprehensive Management Restoration Project'.
August 2020	Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardan Shrinla reached Bangladesh on a two-day sudden visit with a purpose of a last-ditch effort to consolidate its regional position and curb the growing influence of China.
August 2020	While having a hard time, Bangladesh has received US\$ 3.2 billion largest-ever Japanese loan for infrastructure development and Covid-19 recovery.
March 2021	Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh to join the country's 50 <sup>th</sup> Independence Day anniversary and Bangabandhu's birth century celebration.

Source: The author has compiled all these events from various media sources

### Smartest diplomacy in balancing India-China relations

Bangladesh under Hasina, in its conduct of relations with major powers, has been surprisingly successful as it has been maintaining a degree of autonomy and friendly relations with all major partners while at the same time maximizing foreign assistance (Plagemann, 2021). Although the country's foreign policy gesture of closeness with India, particularly through the 'India Positive' approach since 2009, is considered a new shift in foreign policy, it has also successfully maintained balance relations with both India and China even while increasing its economic ties to China in recent years (Plagemann, 2021; Masud, 2016). Both China and India in recent years have been involved with Bangladesh through various economic initiatives, loans, grants, and investment offers to exercise influence, but Bangladesh has been balancing it with the smartest diplomacy under Hasina's prudent leadership.

For instance, throughout the tenure of Hasina's regime, India- Bangladesh relations have entered a new era of cooperation, strengthening ties in areas of trade, connectivity, energy, and defense. Hasina was able to press a grand bargain in all realms, including cooperation to combat terrorism, Bangladeshi products' access to the Indian market, resolution of disputes, and restoring trans-border connectivity (Mohan, 2021). Not only Bangladesh has uprooted anti-India insurgency elements

from its borders, but it was able to make the India-Bangladesh border one of the most peaceful regions in the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, both countries have successfully resolved long-content border issues by ratifying the historic Land Boundary Agreement in 2015 (Approval of border deal, 2015; Anwar & Kugelman, 2021; Plagemann, 2021). Furthermore, Bangladesh has become the biggest trading partner of India in the region as exports have reached US\$9.21 billion while imports US\$1.04 billion during the financial year 2018-19. Cooperation between both countries has deepened, and Bangladesh has attained three Lines of Credit (LoC), about US\$ 8 billion from India for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports. Thus, Bangladesh is the biggest development partner of India (Anwar, 2019; Basu, 2020). Hence, this broad range of issues has made an unprecedented depth to the bilateral relationship between both the countries and that also enabled Dhaka to see itself not as landlocked but rather as land-linked and river linked to India and the other neighboring countries in the region (Mohan, 2021).

On the contrary, China shares no physical border with Bangladesh, rather both countries have a distance of only about 100km between them. Still, China hopes to bridge the distance through infrastructure development that would link both countries closer. Bangladesh has viewed China as a central location for its strategic advances in the Indian Ocean along with BRI (Anwar & Kugelman,

2021). Under Hasina, Bangladesh's relations with China have improved dramatically since China launched BRI in 2013 and President Xi Jinping's visit to the country as the first Chinese president in 30 years (Basu, 2020). Consequently, Bangladesh has found China as a top trading partner, direct foreign investor, military hardware supplier, and particularly trade importer while granting duty-free access to China's market to 97 percent of Bangladeshi products. Furthermore, China has decided to make deep inroads, develop a mega smart city near Dhaka, build an airport in Sylhet in the Eastern part of the country besides a growing defense relationship by providing military tanks, frigates, submarines, fighter jets, and many other pieces of equipment (Anwar & Kugelman, 2021).

Notwithstanding, it has already implemented US\$ 10 billion worth of infrastructure projects, including economic zones and power plants. Not only Bangladesh has received an investment amount of US\$ 24 billion during Xi's visit in 2016, but it successfully signed an MoU in 2019 with a Chinese firm to build renewable energy projects by 2023 that will be able to provide a total of 500 megawatts of power (Anwar, 2019). Additionally, China has assisted with much-needed medical supplies and the Covid-19 vaccine to Bangladesh to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and urged its concern of agreeing Bangladesh form sister city alliances with Chinese cities to develop people-to-people relations across the borders (Anwar & Kugelman, 2021).

Not only just India-China, under Hasina's leadership, the country is also trying to extend this balancing act into geo-politics. According to Gowher Rizvi, advisor of international affairs to Prime Minister Hasina, "*Bangladesh is a part of BRI, and at the same time it is also interested to be part of the Indo-Pacific relationship* (Anwar, 2019)." It shows an apparent reference to the US Indo-Pacific policy that is strongly endorsed by India and is meant to counterbalance China's drastic rise. However, in the end, Dhaka under Hasina's regime doesn't want to pick and particular side; rather, it wants to diversify its partnership with multiple actors to foster its ability to act independently and gain maximum interest for the country (Anwar, 2019; Basu, 2020).

### **Diplomacy towards Deepening Bilateral Relations**

#### **Diplomatic Gift giving and Sheikh Hasina**

Diplomatic gift exchanging is a long historical art for the leaders of different countries around the globe (Bizzarri,

2016). A diplomatic gift or gift of the state is often considered a symbol of cherished friendship as well as respect that promotes friendly relations between states and enhances cooperation to acquire their economic, commercial, cultural, scientific, and other goals (Hellman & Meersbergen, 2020). While the right gift possibly can seal sustainable relationships, it is one of the difficult gifts to give as it is needed to be ensured that the recipient state receives it respectfully. Whereas exchanging of diplomatic gifts by states is a vital part of international diplomacy, countries try to prepare the gifts following their traditions, cultures, and uniqueness that will help to build and strengthen the relationship (Bizzarri, 2016). According to Barry Lopez,

"The exchange of gifts held us together for so many centuries. It has made it possible to overpass the gap where language even struggles (NMAD, 2010)."

For instance, Panda diplomacy by China where China sends pandas to zoos around the globe as special thank you gifts. It has an enormous diplomatic success while it was also seen as evidence of China's interest to establish official relations with the US in 1972. Likewise, Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina has also exchanged different diplomatic gifts as enduring emblems of friendship and international cooperation.

#### **Hilsa Diplomacy of Hasina**

Hilsha fish has predominantly been influential in the history of Bengali delicacies. It is abundant in Bangladesh, accounting for almost seventy-five percent of the world's Hilsha production (Bhowmick, 2021). However, it is not only at the core of the Bengali identity, but also it figures in the diplomatic talks between India and Bangladesh. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina introduced Hilsa diplomacy twenty-four years ago by sending Hilsa to Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu before the landmark Ganges water-sharing treaty was signed between Bangladesh and India in 1996 (Liton, 2017).

Furthermore, Hasina sent Hilsha along with other gifts to Mamata Banerjee (CM of India's West Bengal) in 2010 as a goodwill gesture (Dev, 2021; Bhowmick, 2021). Noteworthy, she had famously laid out a five-course meal

of fish, including Hilsha, when Indian President Pranab Mukherjee visited Bangladesh in 2010 (Ahmed, 2017;

Liton 2017). Although Bangladesh imposed a ban on Hilsha exports to India from 2012 to 2018 over the dispute of the Teesta Water sharing treaty, recently it has sent Hilsha to India's counterparts in their different festivals such as Durga Puja (the biggest festival of the Hindu religion), Jamaisashti (Hindu festival) and so on (Ahmed, 2017; Dev, 2021). In Mamata's visit to Bangladesh in 2015, Hasina stated that Hilsa would be sent into West Bengal once Teesta River water starts to flow into Bangladesh as per its rights. She also sent 20kg of Hilsha to Mamata in 2016. In her 2017's India visit, Hasina took 20kg Hilsa along with other gifts and she cooked 'steamed Hilsha' on her second day of visit at the Rashtrapati Bhavan (President House of India) for the Indian President Pranab Mukherjee, who was expected to break the deadlock over Teesta water sharing issue and thus she took her Hilsa diplomacy to a new level (Ahmed, 2017; Dev, 2021).

Nevertheless, discussion over the Teesta water sharing between Bangladesh and India has been continuing for the past twenty years, but the treaty has not been signed yet due to the opposition from West Bengal, particularly Mamata's opposition to Manmohan Singh's visit to Bangladesh in 2011 and Modi's visit in 2015 (Ahmed, 2017, Liton, 2017; Dev, 2021). Narendra Modi, however, indicated that the treaty would be signed during the tenure of his government. In addition, Hilsa is a diplomatic symbol in the ups and downs of Indian-Bangladesh relations and if the Teesta water treaty is signed soon, Hasina's Hilsa diplomacy will get a big boost and will be considered important like Ping-Pong diplomacy between the USA and China (Ahmed, 2017).

### **Mango Diplomacy of Hasina**

The mango has become a key tool of Bangladesh's public diplomacy globally, particularly in recent years, as a significant gesture of friendship and goodwill. Nonetheless, 'Mango Diplomacy' is not a new term rather it has been a tradition in South-Asian politics for a long time (Kumar, 2021; Mango diplomacy: Bangladesh, 2021). According to the book "Mao's Golden Mangoes and the Cultural Revolution," Pakistan mangoes have a good history in China when the two countries were launching their ongoing diplomatic romance in the 1960s (Kumar, 2021). Consequently, it was found that the juicy and pulpy fruit had sweetened bilateral ties while impacting Chinese history in unexpected ways. It has also played a vital role in Cultural Revolution discourse.

Furthermore, mangoes have also been used in diplomacy and intrigue between the leaders of Pakistan and India, particularly locally between political entities and diplomats posted in those countries. For instance, Pakistani leader General Zia-ul Haq sent mangoes called 'Anwar Ratul' to the then Indian famous Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the 1980s. Similarly, General Pervez Musharraf had sent mangoes to the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee coming to India for the Agra Summit in 2001 (Kumar, 2021). Likewise, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif reportedly sent mangoes to his Indian counterpart in 2015, following a muddle of ceasefire violations along the border. However, Pakistan sends mangoes to political leaders of various countries and has used 'mango diplomacy' to secure friendships (Mango diplomacy: Bangladesh, 2021).

While 'mango diplomacy' has a good history between India and Pakistan, Bangladesh also has followed the same pathway in recent times under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina. She has gifted mangoes to the leaders of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives as a goodwill gesture and symbol of friendship. According to the present Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Dr. A.K. Abdul Momen:

"We have sweetest, juicy and delicious mangoes and produced ample of them. Thereby, we would like to share our happiness and mangoes with our closest neighbors and friends in this notable year of Mujib Borsho and Golden Jubilee year of Bangladesh's independence, and hence, we gifted mangoes to our neighbors and friends. Let them share our happiness and joys too (Sidhant, 2021)."

### **Mango Diplomacy towards India**

India and Bangladesh relations have entered a new era of cooperation while strengthening in areas of trade, energy, defense, and connectivity (Asianet, 2021). Under Dhaka's 'mango diplomacy', Prime Minister Hasina has sent 2600kg of Hariabhanga mangoes to her Indian counterpart and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Ram Nath Kovind, West Bengal's CM Mamata Banerjee, and Tripura's CM Biplab Deb in July 2021 (Mango diplomacy: Bangladesh, 2021). The gift from Hasina was sent at a time when there is growing dissatisfaction on the Bangladeshi side as India halted exports of Covid-19 vaccines without prior declaration. Nevertheless, the two countries have also clashed over

the water sharing from the Teesta River. However, after receiving the gift, Narendra Modi has written to Hasina thanking her for the gift and said he was 'touched' by Sheikh Hasina's thoughtful gesture (Sidhant, 2021). He also expressed his thanks following way:

"It was a pleasant mnemonic of your hospitality that Bangladesh extended to me on my last visit. The cooperation between India and Bangladesh had continued to foster in all areas of the bilateral relationship despite the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. I reiterate our commitment to progress our mutually beneficial cooperation (Das, 2021)."

However, Bangladesh and India have maintained a strong relationship, and there is considerable scope for further enhancement of relations and resolving the unresolved bilateral issues. It is noteworthy that Bangladesh was the destination for Narendra Modi's first and only foreign visit since the Covid-19 outbreak (PM Modi, 2021.).

### **Mango Diplomacy Towards Pakistan**

Sheikh Hasina sent the delicious premier quality Haribhanga mangoes to Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan in July 2021 as a goodwill gesture and part of her 'mango diplomacy' (PM Hasina sends..., 2021). After receiving the gift with much appreciation, a press statement issued by the Bangladesh High Commission in Islamabad said that the goodwill gesture of the Prime minister would remain symbolic in the relationship between the two countries in the South Asia region. However, it is an indication of the positive development of the relationship between the two countries.

Before this, a telephone contact between Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan came in July 2020 after months of efforts to normalize and strengthen the ties between the two countries after years of deep freeze (Imran Khan phones Sheikh Hasina..., 2020; Purohit, 2020). According to Imran Khan, Pakistan is highly interested in deepening fraternal relations with Bangladesh based on mutual faith, respect, and particularly sovereign equality. The Nation (One of Pakistan's dailies) described the telephone conversation between the two Prime Ministers as the 'Dawn of a new Era' and 'a beginning of a new horizon' for relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan (Syed, 2020). It is noteworthy that Pakistan and Bangladesh's relationship took a nosedive after Sheikh

Hasina started her second tenure as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in 2009 and resumed the 1971 trial of the 'war crimes' (Syed, 2020).

### **Mango Diplomacy Towards other Countries**

Sheikh Hasina sent Bangladeshi delicious mangoes to Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa in July 2021 as a goodwill gesture. In a reply, the Rajapaksa expressed his wholehearted gratitude and hope that it symbolizes the fruitful relationship between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (PM Hasina sends..., 2021). Likewise, Hasina has also sent 500kgs of 'Harivanga' mangoes to Maldives' President Ibrahim Mohammad Solih as a token of friendship and as a part of her mango diplomacy (UNB, 2021). Additionally, besides India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, Bangladesh has sent mangoes to Bhutan, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and others in 2021 (UNV, 2021).

### **Economic Diplomacy**

Over the last few years, under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, the economy of Bangladesh has pulled itself up by bootstraps, and it was regarded as the fastest growing economy in South Asia in 2020. Its foreign reserves also reached US\$ 45 billion in March 2021 from around US\$9 billion in 2010, while inward remittances reached US\$200 billion, and the country has emerged as the new Royal Bengal Tiger of Asia (Mohan, 2021). In the case of Bangladesh, realization and policy formulation on economic diplomacy have not been developed for many years since independence, but Hasina's government has taken effective policies, and the recent economic rise of the country motivates to reinforce economic diplomacy for expanding trade, business, and cooperation to achieve self-reliance (Islam, 2020). Henceforth, the country has started to exhibit its economic rise and forge deeper ties and cooperation with neighboring countries. Moreover, it has evolved as an excellent example of friendship not only for its neighboring countries but also for the distant countries located in various regions as well as continents (Islam, 2020). Likewise, Sheikh Hasina has prioritized the economy in its foreign policy formulations (Chaudhury, 2019). For instance, at the Bangladeshi envoy's conference in London in July 2019, she asked Bangladeshi envoys to pursue economic diplomacy as one of the topmost priorities to sustain the uninterrupted development in Bangladesh (The Print, 2019).

Nonetheless, in October 2019, PM Hasina, at the World Economic Forum Summit in New Delhi, presented Bangladesh as the economic hub and asked global investors to invest in Bangladesh. In addition, the country has expanded its trade with various countries, particularly with major ASEAN countries, while going to have trade pacts with some ASEAN countries as well as joining different connectivity projects (Anwar & Kugelman, 2021). Notwithstanding, the agreements on economic cooperation with different countries visualize the significance of Bangladesh fastening to economic diplomacy not only in its foreign policy formulations but in implementations too. Hence, Bangladesh's GDP has grown from US\$102 billion in 2009 to US\$ 302 billion in 2019 (Islam, 2020). Similarly, UNCTAD's statistics show that there is a 9.5% merchandise exports growth rate in 2018, where 95% covers manufactured goods among the export products (The Print, 2019). Thereby, it has become an exporting country mainly because of its textile and ready-made garments industries which generated US\$ 30 billion in exports in 2019 (Islam, 2020). Consequently, it has secured the second-largest manufacturer of textile and garment apparel (The Print, 2019). Thereby, it has smartly performed balancing diplomacy among the major power rivalries and gained the best outcome of it.

### **Foreign Aid, Assistance, and Infrastructure development**

Since 2010, Bangladesh has been upholding a measure of independence and cordial ties with all major powers while at the same time maximizing foreign assistance. As a result, development aid has increased dramatically from 2010 onwards, where it has been found that net foreign aid was almost doubled from US\$2.6 billion in 2016/17 to US\$ 5 billion in 2017/18 (Tashfique, 2019). During 2017/18, China committed US\$ 4.35bn as well as India US\$ 4.5bn of the total US\$14.86bn in aid commitments (Plagemann, 2021). Likewise, US bilateral aid also has been on an upward trajectory, whereas Japanese engagements have increased throughout the past decade (USAID, 2020; OECD, 2020). While BRI-related investments from China's pledges stood at approximately US\$38 billion in 2020, Bangladesh received three LoCs over the last decade, amounting to around US\$10bn. Similarly, various infrastructure projects, as well as road construction initiatives with the assistance of major partners, have shown the country's

successful engagement and diplomacy. Moreover, the country has received more than US\$3 billion in loans for the 6.15 km Padma Bridge along with Padma bridge construction responsibility, although the World Bank canceled its US\$1.2 billion credit in 2012 for the same project (Plagemann, 2021; Byron, 2019). Nevertheless, in 2019 ADB declared to fund the Dhaka-Sylhet four-lane highway extension project while the China Harbor Engineering Company was blacklisted by Bangladeshi regulators for its attempt to bribe (Byron, 2019). Similarly, the country has been involved with different partners, including China, Japan, India, Belgium, and so on for its existing port development and deep seaport building for maintaining Bangladesh's competitiveness in catering to Western export markets (Byron, 2019). Thereby, it is visible that Bangladesh today can reach out in various directions with its efficient bargaining capacity (Plagemann, 2021). However, these increasing loans as well as grants to various infrastructure development projects with the assistance of different countries indicate Sheikh Hasina's prudent leadership enabled Bangladesh to turn major power competitions into economic benefits.

**Foreign Direct Investment:** In recent years, Bangladesh has been in dire need of investment while some major power, including China and India, sees investment in Bangladesh to extend their influence. Meanwhile, the country has seized the opportunity with the smartest diplomacy under prudent leadership and has been using opportunities to fill the country's FDI deficit (The Print, 2019). Moreover, the country is on the way to setting up 100 special economic zones along with one-stop services to attract Foreign Direct Investments or FDI, and consequently, the inflow of FDI to the country has almost tripled during her nine years in office (Islam, 2020; The Print, 2019). Furthermore, because of her, series of measures, including building up investment-friendly infrastructure, boosting the energy sector, providing necessary facilities and support to establish industries as well as easy rules and regulations with the smartest policies, the confidence of foreign investors has increased in Bangladesh. At an international conference of the "Heads of Government Round-table with Senior Business leaders" chaired by Prime Minister of England Theresa May, Sheikh Hasina deeply asserted:

"I invite you, particularly leaders from the global business enterprises to invest in our country Bangladesh. Rest assured, you will have the full

patronization of my government in one of Asia’s most robust FDI incentive regimes” (PM Hasina Woos..., 2018/2018).

Additionally, the smartest policy with diplomacy, sustained economic growth, rapidly expanding domestic market as well as growing connectivity with a vast regional market of four billion people makes the country a promising destination for foreign investment.

Nevertheless, due to the prioritization of economic diplomacy and the most competitive policies for FDI, in Bangladesh, FDI flow has increased from US\$ 700 million in 2009 to US\$ 3613 million in 2018 (Islam, 2020). Consequently, the country secured the second recipient of FDI in South Asia in 2018 (Bangladesh is ready..., 2018; PM Hasina Woos..., 2018).

Table 2. Foreign direct investment flow in Bangladesh (Millions of dollars) (Islam, 2020).

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Value	700	913	1136	1293	1599	1551	2235	2333	2152	3613

Source: Islam, 2020.

**Financial Assistance to Some Countries**

Under Hasina, Bangladesh believes in behaving responsibly with its all neighbor and at the same time reaching out to those who need help (Plagemann, 2021). However, since the country's independence, it has been taking on aid, grants, and financial assistance, but today it is also supporting friends with debt relief showing the progress the country has made under Hasina (Mohan, 2021). Consequently, it has evolved as an example of a good friend not only for neighboring countries but also for far-off countries in different regions. For instance:

**Currency Swap with Sri Lanka**

Sheikh Hasina has supported cash-strapped Sri Lanka with a US\$200 million loan through a currency swap deal. Noteworthy, since the 2019 Easter bombings and afterward the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sri Lankan economy has been in big trouble (Basu, 2021). Additionally, the foreign debt of the country is at a critical stage that leads to immense balance of payment issues. Hence, the country reportedly has US\$ 3.7 billion of foreign debt in the year 2021. However, Bangladesh has participated in the currency swap due to its growing economy and Hasina’s neighborhood policy. This cooperation from Bangladesh will help in boosting their economy, and it is expected to be a lifeline for the Sri Lankan economy (The Print, 2021). Before the cooperation from Bangladesh, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa asked Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a US \$ 1 billion credit swap but India rejected it (Basu, 2021).

**Debt Relief to Sudan and Somalia**

Bangladesh has pledged to provide 5.32 million SDR (Special Drawing Rights) to the African country Sudan as

debt relief while it was seeking help (Hossain, 2021; Bangladesh gives relief..., 2021). It was a response by Hasina’s government following a call from the IMF (International Monetary Fund), and the purpose was to erase the debts that Sudan owed to the IMF for a long time (Hossain, 2021). Noteworthy, Sudan has been in huge economic trouble since the expulsion of former President Omar al Bashir in the year 2019 and heavy international sanctions. Thus, the crisis has made Sudan steadily indebted as its outward debt increased to around US\$ 50 billion at the end of 2019, and it has been battered by excessive pressure on loan payments (Hossain, 2021; TBS, 2021). Hence, the debt relief supported by Bangladesh would assist the country in unsealing access to the needed resources and helping to rejoin the global economy after years of segregation to increase its economic growth as well as break the poverty shackles (TBS, 2021). Nevertheless, existing bilateral relations between these two countries are superb, and the financial assistance would take the relations to a new height. However, Sudan is the 2<sup>nd</sup> African country after Somalia that obtained financial assistance as debt relief from Bangladesh (TBS, 2021). In 2019, Bangladesh had also given 0.70 million SDR as debt relief to Somalia to help the country with poverty assuagement as part of the initiative from IMF (Byron, 2020). The global image of Bangladesh has largely benefitted through this financial assistance and grants.

**Diplomacy for the Leasing of Foreign Agricultural Land**

With a growing population and shrinking farmland because of rapid industrialization as well as

urbanization, many importing countries sought alternate ways to maintain stable flows with less price of foreign firm products (Sholk, 2016). Consequently, a large-scale international scramble to lease or purchase vast areas of foreign land has emerged as a viable solution to obtain food security. Following the pathway of neighboring China and India, Sheikh Hasina-led government has been trying to open windows to the agricultural labor market, particularly through 'Contract Farming' and 'job opportunity for Bangladeshis abroad, mostly in some African countries as the government realizes and fears that the Middle East's labor market will be blown shortly (Siddiqui, 2021). For this, a fact-finding mission sent by the foreign ministry of Bangladesh found the possibility the production of rice, wheat, cotton, coffee, etc. in those countries would be profitable at the same time, feasible for the Bangladeshi investors (Siddiqui, 2021; Bangladesh Eyes on Farming, 2021). Likewise, an inter-ministerial committee has also been formed to look into the issue of the African labor market, and the government is hopeful and expressed that around four million Bangladeshis can be employed in four African countries by 2027 (Siddiqui, 2021).

Nevertheless, initially, the government has targeted four countries, including Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, and The Gambia, but they have a goal to expand it in Countries like Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Latvia, Senegal, Ghana, Zambia, mostly Sub-Saharan Africa possesses enormous possibilities in this regard (Bangladesh Eyes on Farming, 2021). Although the government commenced initiatives to lease agricultural land and create employment opportunities in Africa a decade ago, in recent years, Bangladeshi ambassadors have been working hard to make government-to-government level agreements. In the meantime, Bangladesh has begun actively finding various farming alternates outside the country, mainly in the region like the Middle East and African countries, using several bilateral and multilateral channels, particularly the platform of OIC. In this regard, the present Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Dr. A.K. Abdul Momen, in a program organized by Bangabandhu Research Centre of Foreign Policy and Diplomacy, stated that:

"The OIC is a good option to leverage Bangladesh access to the heart of Africa, and through the platform like IOFS the country is working to take some projects in the African region for harvesting crops" (Bangladesh Eyes on Farming,

2021).

It has been almost a decade since Sheikh Hasina's government commenced initiatives for leasing agricultural land in Africa with "Contract Farming," particularly in Zambia. In addition, the Bangladeshi company got a positive response, leasing around 1000 acres of land from Kenya for cotton cultivation (Siddiqui, 2021). They have also finalized their way to cooperate with Sudan for agricultural development and fishing. Furthermore, Bangladesh is currently working through the Islamic Food Processing Association IFPA to channel intra-OIC investment in the agro-food processing sector and at the same time create a dedicated fund for agro-industrial development through Islamic Development Bank IDB. Consequently, Dr. Momen asserted that:

"Our policy of leasing foreign farmland determining the goal of sustainable agriculture does not only ensure the survival of our nation, but it also surely opens the doors to prosperity, exchange as well as expand our national footprint across the globe" (Bangladesh Eyes on Farming, 2021).

### **Climate Diplomacy**

Climate diplomacy has become a vital arena for countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century not only to claim compensation for damages but also for making a safer future (Azim, 2017). Although Bangladesh has turned into one of the most vulnerable countries due to adverse impacts of climate change, it has adopted Delta Plan-2100 along with National Adaptation Plan in recent years under Hasina's leadership to achieve sustainable development goals by diminishing losses of natural disasters and climate change (Bangladesh's leadership in environment..., 2021). In this regard, the country has been spending about \$5 billion (nearly 2.5% of the GDP) every year on climate adaptation, mitigation, and resilience-building measures (Bangladesh's leadership in environment..., 2021). As an emerging economy, it has taken several more praiseworthy attempts to make its mark on the global 'climate diplomacy' arena (Huq, 2021).

Notwithstanding, Bangladesh has already gained some reputation for its efforts in climate negotiations. Whereas the country successfully managed the approval of the membership of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in short IPBES in 2012 (Huq, 2021). Likewise, it is one of the leading founding members of the Climate Vulnerable

Forum short CVF and V20, the flagship global partnership of countries highly vulnerable to climate change, which was established in 2009 (Shovon, 2021). Nonetheless, Bangladesh's leadership as chair of CVF during the 2011-13 tenure for climate-vulnerable nations was much appreciated when the forum effectively managed to uphold itself as a vibrant platform of South-South cooperation to act together to meet the climate emergency and continuously pursued negotiation with developed countries regarding global warming-related issues particularly to reduce carbon emission as well as to acquire compensation for vulnerable countries (Shovon, 2021).

Over the years, the country under Hasina's leadership has emerged as a global role model in climate diplomacy, along with its significant steps toward making the best use of diplomatic platforms to address the concerns of climate change and environmental issues (Huq, 2021). Nevertheless, Hasina has emerged as a key figure and most admired one in the fight against the adverse impacts of climate change throughout her tenure as a Prime Minister. Consequently, Hasina was awarded "Champion of the Earth" by the UN in 2015 as a recognition of its success in facing climate change-related challenges (Shovon, 2021). Meanwhile, BBC, in a recent report published immediately after the COP26, placed her as one of the five best deal-makers of COP26, where Bangladesh participated as the incumbent Chair of the CVF and was an active participant Bangladesh's successful climate diplomacy, 2021). According to Sheikh Hasina, "Global leader's consensus over the mitigation and adaptation of climate change effects and their assurance to further accelerate the climate funding process were some vital achievements in the 26<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Scotland" (Bangladesh's successful climate diplomacy, 2021). However, Bangladesh's leadership and efforts in environmental diplomacy have been lauded in the global arena in recent years.

### **Humanitarian Efforts Rohingya Refugee Crisis**

The Rohingya ethnic community living in the Rakhine province of Myanmar had crossed into Bangladesh over decades, particularly from 1978 due to severe persecution in their land. However, at present, Bangladesh is hosting more than a million Rohingya people with the recent influx since 2017 after large-scale

violence following a military crackdown (NDTV, 2019). While the major powers in the region and beyond closed their doors, Bangladesh, under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, opened the door for those helpless Rohingya people and has been providing basic provisions of life like food, shelter, healthcare, and other services to this huge number of people in a coordinated approach where UNHCR is actively involved. Thereby, it is regarded as one of the examples of the biggest refugee crisis and, at the same time, the greatest humanitarian support in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Along with various global leaders, Antonio Guterres, current Secretary-General of the United Nations, highly appreciated the kindness of Sheikh Hasina and Bangladesh in responding to the crisis (Ahmed, 2020). In addition, helping the Rohingya community to a safe return to their motherland Myanmar and resolving the crisis through internationalization of the issue has become a key foreign policy priority for Hasina, and henceforth, the country has consistently advocated Rohingya issues strongly at bilateral, regional, and international forums (TBS, 2020). Therefore, the country has engaged in humanitarian diplomacy, including advocacy, negotiation, communication, formal agreements, and other measures for safe repatriation (Ahmed, 2020). Despite the robust diplomatic measures of Bangladesh regarding repatriation, Myanmar has been very reluctant to take back its people. Although zero success was there in the repatriation, there has been something positive for Bangladesh regarding relocating them from camps in Cox's Bazar to Bhashan Char (an island developed and managed by the Bangladesh Navy) (NDTV, 2019). Nevertheless, Prime Minister Hasina, mentioning that Bangladesh helped the world avoid a major regional conflict by giving temporary shelter to the Rohingya community in 2017, has consistently urged world leaders to act seriously to ensure the repatriation of forcibly displaced more than a million Rohingya people to their own country Myanmar (Sheikh Hasina calls on world leaders..., 2021).

### **Medical Assistance During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused by a new coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2, presents major challenges in intensive and still evolving ways, with high death tolls and extreme health, economic and social impacts worldwide. Capable states around the world have come forward to help their neighboring and friend countries by

providing different medical assistance. With no exception, Bangladesh has also come forward to assist its friends and neighbors with limited available resources. The country has sent Covid relief aid, including various anti-viral drugs, Covid protective gears, and Remdesivir, to its neighboring India twice as the country was facing serious challenges (Bangladesh sends 2nd consignment..., 2021). According to the online newspaper The Print (2021), "Bangladesh's medical assistance to India marks the rise of a new tiger in the Asian economy."

Similarly, the country has also sent emergency Covid-19 medicines and medical support to countries like Indonesia, Nepal, Maldives, and some other countries in between 2020-2021 as a friendly gesture (Covid-19: Bangladesh, 2021). In addition, Bangladesh has sent a medical team to support the government of Maldives in its efforts to contain the swift spread of Covid-19 through a nationwide vaccination program taken by President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih (Gov.MV, 2021).

### **Covid-19 Pandemic Management and Vaccine Diplomacy**

Bangladesh has got tremendous success in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic under the prudent leadership of Hasina. Bloomberg report in December 2021 showed that the country was ranked as one of the top 20 countries which performed well in tackling the challenges of the pandemic through implementing a series of policy actions, special directives, social safety net, multi-sectoral fiscal measures, compensation packages, vaccine diplomacies and so on (TBS, 2021). Bangladesh launched a nationwide vaccination program in February 2021, very early in comparison to many countries, by procuring the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine (Bangladesh kicks off nationwide Covid-19, 2021). The country at one stage found itself in a very challenging situation concerning the attainment of vaccines because of the failure of the Serum Institute of India to supply vaccines under a deal as well as the unavailability of vaccines across the globe owing to high infection rates (Bhattacharjee, 2021). But within a very short time, that challenging situation erupted due to the government's immense responses and diplomatic successes (Bangladesh is 18 notches up, 2021).

While Vaccine Diplomacy has emerged as a new priority in a striking new normal caused by the Covid-19

pandemic, the country has engaged with actors from multiple international circles repeatedly, and its diplomatic initiatives regarding vaccination have been very persistent (Abbas, 2021). Hence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Hasina's guidance can be acclaimed as it played a proactive role in requesting vaccine purchases as well as donations from many countries worldwide. Moreover, it managed to approach a strong partnership with China to receive nearly 15 million Sinopharm vaccines within a few months, and Bangladesh managed to agree with China and signed an MoU to co-produce vaccines in Bangladesh (Momen: Russia agrees..., 2021; Abbas, 2021). In the meantime, it has also facilitated collaboration with COVAX, the USA, and Japan to receive millions of Moderna, Pfizer, and AstraZeneca vaccines (Momen: Russia agrees..., 2021). At the same time, the country is expected to receive Jhonson & Jhonson vaccines in 2022 due to the success in leveraging strong partnerships. Furthermore, it has also initiated a contract with Russia to co-produce and purchase Sputnik vaccines (Momen: Russia agrees..., 2021). In short, Bangladesh has enjoyed much success in leveraging existing and strong partnerships to receive vaccines with its timely, effective efforts under strong leadership. According to Foreign Minister Dr. AK Abdul Momen,

"Bangladesh has been highly successful in vaccine diplomacy under the leadership of Prime Minister, and henceforth there is no shortage of vaccines in our country (Vaccine Diplomacy, 2022)."

### **DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

Since the independence of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, its behaviors towards international actors and diplomacy have gone through different phases of development, emphasizing the principle of "*Friendship towards all and malice towards no one*" (Islam, 2020)." But after Sheikh Hasina's power acquisition in 2009 through a landslide victory in the national election, the landscape of diplomacy and getting attached to different actors have changed in several ways (Plagemann, 2021). The country has started experiencing successes in a longstanding effort to strengthen positive and beneficial economic, political, and security relations with its neighbors as well as other international actors. Today, for the first time since its birth, Bangladesh enjoys a balanced relationship with all the major partners and

neighboring countries.

It is to mention that foreign policy and major power relations have always been the Prime Minister's authority, particularly in Bangladesh. "Friendship to all, malice towards none" is the primary ideology of foreign policy that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman enunciated in the constitution in 1972, and following this policy, Sheikh Hasina also has been maintaining diplomatic relations with the world (Islam, 2020). Hasina brought dynamism to the foreign policy of Bangladesh and made a strategic shift in the country's diplomacy formulations prioritizing both India and China in the development trajectory (Plagemann, 2021). Under her high-level pro-activism in foreign policy, Bangladesh has maintained positive relations with neighboring countries and expanded its helping hand to other countries while more firmly advancing its territorial and resource interests and claims.

In recent years, it is found that Bangladesh has been able to maintain good relations with all countries while resolving major long contended border issues, both inland, and maritime sphere, with its neighboring states (Anwar & Kugelman, 2021). Moreover, today blue economy has also become a key area of Hasina's policy. Henceforth, it has successfully signed a Blue Economy agreement with both India and China though they are rivals in many aspects.

On the other hand, the country appears to be better at gauging the diversity of today's investors and their geo-economic interests. Apart from balancing China, India, and Russia along with maintaining strong ties through Hasina's diplomatic wizardry, Bangladesh has even attempted to improve its relations with Pakistan, from which the country got independence after a bloody war in 1971 (Syed, 2020; Qadir, 2016). Recently, it also sees South-South cooperation as an effective mechanism for fostering cooperation among the Southern countries. As a result, the country has made South-South cooperation a part of its National Policy and has been awarded South-South Award in 2013 to make dramatic progress in poverty reduction (Islam, 2020).

Notwithstanding, although Bangladesh's realization of economic diplomacy has not been initiated for many years, the recent economic growth under Hasina's regime has motivated the country to reinforce economic diplomacy to expand trade and business and ultimately achieve economic self-reliance in a long run. Consequently, the country has incessantly grown at a

rate of 7% and, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, has registered a growth rate of 5.2% in the fiscal year of 2020-21 has been seen (Mohan, 2021). Notwithstanding, Bangladesh is also among the 40 countries that have sent Covid relief aid to India twice as the country struggled to fight against the pandemic caused by Covid-19. Likewise, the country has helped out cash-strapped Sri Lanka with a US\$200 million loan through a currency swap deal (The Print, 2021). Thus, the country has evolved as a perfect example of a true friend not only for its neighboring states but also for the distant countries located in different regions.

Under Hasina, Bangladesh has followed a peace-centric approach. For example, Bangladesh opened the door for the persecuted displaced Rohingya people while the major powers in the region and beyond locked the door. As a result, the country with limited resources is providing shelter, food, and other needs to millions of Rohingya people (Ahmed, 2020).

Nonetheless, Bangladesh has always been there to stand with other countries with humanitarian assistance in times of their danger. Similarly, it has come forward during the Covid-19 pandemic with assistance from India, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and other neighboring states. Additionally, the country is currently considering closer neighborly ties without undermining others. However, from providing India with Covid relief materials to extending financial help to Sri Lanka in its hour of crisis, including debt relief to Sudan, diplomatic gifts to various neighboring countries, smartest economic diplomacy as well as bargaining ability, and so on, the country has started to exhibit its vast economic rise and use it to forge deeper relations with neighbors. Even though financial assistance to other countries is a part of humanitarian efforts, it ultimately brands the country positively by building its image globally. Nevertheless, the country has changed its global appearance through its steady success of GDP growth, although once it was labeled as a 'basket case' by Henry Kissinger, it has now emerged as a future Asian Tiger (Mohan, 2021). Hence, referring to Bangladesh's emergence as a donor state, Prabir De, professor at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), stated recently that "Bangladesh is the new Royal Bengal Tiger of Asia (Plagemann, 2021)." The country's economic advancement and contribution to the world economy have also earned praise even from its arch-rival Pakistan. Thereby, the country becomes an icon not only for

struggling countries but also for many donor countries of the world.

In addition, the country under Hasina has provided different gifts to its neighboring country to foster its relations and as a gesture of goodwill. Thus, cooperation and partnership at a different level, including bilateral, regional, and international cooperation based on rules and norms, have been the key defining features of Bangladesh's foreign policy under the Hasina regime. Not only the country strongly supports SAARC, BIMSTEC, BCIM Economic Corridor, IORA, APEC, and so other, but also it has promoted sub-regional cooperation by allowing India to use its land, water, and ports along with asking Nepal and Bhutan to use its Saidpur airport, Chittagong and Mongla ports (Islam, 2020). Thereby, the country demonstrated the significance of constructive engagement with its neighbors and beyond. For instance, Gowher Rizvi, advisor of international affairs to Prime Minister Hasina, asserted that Bangladesh is a part of the BRI and at the same time, it is interested to be a part of the Indo-Pacific relationship (Anwar, 2019). Thus, it is clear that the country has avoided exclusive alliances while moving with the 'going forward' strategy.

Nevertheless, the above discussions show that recent initiatives in diplomacy and foreign relations imply nothing but a more proactive approach to foreign policy. From 2010 to the present, 'moving forward', attainment of the best outcome and development interests while safeguarding national sovereignty and security have taken an increasingly prominent role in Sheikh Hasina's prudent leadership. However, Bangladesh's foreign relations appear to have benefitted from the autocratic stability under Hasina's regime (Mohan, 2021). During her tenure, Bangladesh concentrated on dealing with all the major powers simultaneously and over time. Hence, many observers asserted that the country's diplomacy is well resourced to navigate the intricacies of major power rivalries and gain the best possible interests. Thus, the country is moving fast, and its external relations are going forward while reflecting the growing significance of national security and economic development with the vision of 2041. In the international realm, it is believed that the success of foreign policy requires not only formulating strong policy but a strong leadership for successful implementation. In Bangladesh, Hasina brought dynamism to foreign policy. Moreover, it is Hasina's prudent leadership charm, decades of political experience, charisma, wisdom, capacity to take

calculated risks, and personal relations with world leaders along with strategic planning that have enabled her to achieve diplomatic successes and also put Bangladesh center-stage of international and regional politics (Qadir, 2016). In addition, the constructive, cooperative, and peace-centric nationalistic foreign policy of Hasina is going to play a leading role in making Bangladesh a developed country by 2041.

But in some cases, Bangladesh's bargaining power remains limited till now. Most significantly, the Rohingya refugee crisis, where the country has hosted more than a million Rohingya people of Myanmar since the influx started in 2017. Moreover, Myanmar still has not taken back any Rohingya nationals of her country, although Bangladesh, with the help of China, facilitated the signing of an agreement on repatriation in 2017 (Plagemann, 2021). Notwithstanding, Bangladesh failed to manage China not to veto at UNSC as it has blocked UN Security Council action over the Rohingya crisis against Myanmar. Until today, the Indian government has neither condemned Myanmar for this crisis nor agreed to accept any responsibility for hosting refugees. Bangladesh has failed to manage the major actors in the region, including India, China, and Russia, to come forward to resolve the issue. This scenario eventually restrains Bangladesh's bargaining power to manage major global powers to resolve the crisis. Another significant failure is to make India agree to a water-sharing agreement over the sharing of the Teesta River which represents Bangladesh's single most important demand in bilateral relations (Plagemann, 2021). Some observers argued that Bangladesh under Hasina prioritizes the economy over security or strategic issues in making relations. For example, the country has already permitted India with minimal cost to use its land, water, and ports to access its northeastern provinces, which arguably possess some security threat to the country. To foster sustainable development, according to do some international observers, Hasina's government should invest in the country's research institutes and think tanks whereas enterprises and think tanks are the major essence to implement overseas projects and the major players in determining overseas national interest.

However, without some exceptions, under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in various spheres, including bilateral relations, smart economic diplomacy, fostering humanitarian efforts, bargaining on climate issues,

Covid-19 management, and vaccine diplomacy. Hence, terming Sheikh Hasina as a champion of human security, Ito Naoki (Japanese Ambassador in Bangladesh) stated that:

“Because she respected human rights and offering of humanitarian support, allowing protection to people, Sheikh Hasina has become a real champion of human security” (Sheikh Hasina champion of human security, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

In the international arena, there is a widespread belief that the success of foreign policy requires not only formulating strong policy but a strong leadership for successful implementation. Notwithstanding, in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina brought dynamism to foreign policy which ultimately satisfies the long-debated argument that political leaders play a significant role in the arena of international relations, foreign policy formulation, and finally executions. Furthermore, since Sheikh Hasina assumed power in 2009 and her tireless efforts to move the country forward, it is found that the landscape of diplomacy and attachment with different actors in the international arena has changed in several ways that have helped in the rapid economic growth of the country. Hence, today the country not only enjoys a balanced relationship but also the country has experienced successes in longstanding efforts to strengthen positive and beneficial economic, political, and security relations with its neighbors as well as other global actors. Thus, the country emerged as a new Asian Tiger today whereas the constructive, cooperative, peace-centric and calculated policies of Sheikh Hasina have played a leading role to make Bangladesh a role model for the development in this competitive world where defined interest defines the foreign policy actions of states. However, not only the country is still in the initial stage to resolve the crisis like the Teesta water issues and the Rohingya refugee crisis, but also facing some challenges in determining overseas national interests along with achieving the best outcome while playing the tactful game in the international arena that needs to be properly addressed to sustain its growth as well as development.

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