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Bangladesh and its Political – Economic Cooperation with Argentina, Chile and Paraguay

The People's Republic of Bangladesh proclaimed its independence on March 26th, 1971; the South Asian nation has over 160 million inhabitants in a territory that extends approximately to 147 thousand square kilometers. Bangladesh is the fifth most populous country in Asia and one of the top nations in terms of its population density in the World. The Bengali language, official language of Bangladesh, is the seventh most popular language of the world. Despite its large size in population and in sovereign territory, Bangladesh is one of the countries with the least political – economic level of cooperation in the Americas; it has only four Embassies (Mexico, United States of America, Brazil, Permanent Mission in the United Nations – NY) and a High Commissioner in Canada.

The presence of Bangladesh in South America is very limited, it is perhaps one of the very few countries in Asia that has not yet fully explored the great potential of its bilateral cooperation with a number of South American Nations including, Argentina,

Chile and Paraguay. On the other hand the aforementioned three countries of South America have been shy to strengthen and further explore the political, economic and commercial ties with the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The Governments of Argentina, Chile and Paraguay ought to expand their diplomatic representation in Dhaka as well as establish strong trade, economic and political partnerships with the Government of Bangladesh. Unfortunately, today these three Latin American countries do not have embassies in Dhaka, despite of the growing role and influence of Bangladesh in the International Arena, World Trade Organization and other multilateral organizations.

Bangladesh and Argentina: an overview of limited bilateral cooperation

Dhaka opened its diplomatic mission to Argentina in late 1970s; however its embassy closed its doors a few years later. On November 19th, 2008, [Ernesto Carlos Alvarez](#) was appointed as the new Ambassador of Argentina to Bangladesh (resident in India) and presented his credential letters to the President of Bangladesh Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed. During his meeting with Argentinean Ambassador Ernesto Carlos Alvarez, the Bangladeshi Head of State noted that: "Argentina can import Bangladeshi world class quality products, including: ships, pharmaceuticals, readymade garments, melamine and ceramics, at a competitive price." In Argentina there is a good demand for the Bangladeshi ceramics, the 'FARR Ceramics' considered to be a major Bangladeshi ceramics exporter to the Southern Cone. [1] On the other hand, the exports of Argentinean [soybean oil](#) to Bangladesh have grown over time. In 2011 the bilateral commercial cooperation had experienced a significant growth; the quantity of exported Argentinean goods to Bangladesh had grown 120 percent in comparison to the same period in 2010. [2] Moreover, Argentina is planning to provide agricultural and livestock research assistance to Bangladesh. Buenos Aires has also shown a great interest to conduct a series of Spanish-language courses for the government officials of

Bangladesh. The visa waiver agreement between both countries is expected to be implemented soon and Dhaka has an Honorary Consulate in Buenos Aires.

On March 6th, 2016, there was organized an International Seminar that shed more light on “Bangladesh’s Relations with Latin American Countries: Unlocking Potentials”. This conference promoted the literary works of Rabindranath Tagore and the cultural cooperation between Bangladesh and Argentina.

In February 27, 2015, another conference was organized by the Liberation War Museum under the auspices of Argentinean Judge and Museum Trustee Mr. Daniel Horacio Obligado. This Conference was attended by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali. [3]

On August 3rd, 2011, the Argentinean Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Alberto D’Alotto met with the Bangladeshi Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Mohamed Mijarul Quayes who was leading an official visit to Buenos Aires.

Both diplomats reviewed the bilateral agenda; there is a greater potential to strengthen bilateral cooperation in: education, science, sports and increase the Argentinean technical cooperation in the Bangladeshi agricultural sector and develop permanent bilateral institutional-technical mechanisms. Very soon, Bangladesh will re-open its Embassy in Buenos Aires.

After his return from South America, Ambassador Mijarul Quayes stated in a press conference in Dhaka that: “we found a big potential for diplomatic and trade relations with countries in Latin America and Caribbean. Latin America has a market for an estimated 590 million people in 20 countries. Product diversification alone cannot help a country to pursue high level of exports unless this initiative is backed by a market diversification.” [4]

On July 28 - 31, 2009, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina Mr. Jorge Enrique Taiana welcomed a group of Bangladeshi politicians under the framework of the First Bi-regional Meeting of Political Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPPAL) and the Organization of the most important Parties in Asia (ICAPP), with the purpose to

analyze, debate and exchange fruitful experiences. This was another important occasion where Bangladeshi politicians shared their government experience with members of Argentinean Government and local political leaders. [5]

Bangladesh and Chile: a focus on agricultural and trade partnership

The Republic of Chile is represented (since 1999) by its Honorary Consul Mr. Asif Chowdhury in Bangladesh and has a concurrent embassy to Dhaka (headquartered in India). The People's Republic of Bangladesh has a concurrent diplomatic representation to Chile through its Embassy in Brazil. On September 12th, 2014, both nations have signed a visa waiver agreement and there is no visa requirement for citizens of both countries when exchanging visits.

On December 15th, 2015, the leadership of *ChileCompra* Agency welcomed a high level delegation from the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) of the Ministry of Planning of Bangladesh. The objective of this visit was to share with Dhaka's officials the experience of public contracts and Santiago's promotion of its products abroad. In his visit to Santiago, Director General of CPTU Mr. Faruque Hossain noted that "we want to exchange information with Chile, better understand its system in order to improve our government agencies." The successful Chilean system has been established many years ago, the principal differences are the regional offices, cooperation agreements signed with many influential actors and training that is provided to suppliers and buyers. The system of public contracts in Bangladesh was established in 2011 it enabled the government to begin with electronic applications one year later and currently there are more than 1,200 public agencies with a purchasing power and 30 thousand active users of this public system. Moreover the Chilean example is remarkable due to its role to empower women and encourage their participation in public markets organized by the general office of *ChileCompra*. [6]

On June 10th, 2015, a public private mission from Chile led by the Director of National Agricultural and Livestock Service Mr. Angel Sartori embarked on a working visit to Bangladesh in order to increase the presence of Chilean Fruit products in this important

Asian market. Mr. Sartori was accompanied by the Chief of International Relations, Mrs. Veronica Echavarri, chief of agricultural and forestry protection Mr. Rodrigo Astete and the General Manager of the Association of Fruit Exports in Chile (ASOEX) Mr. Miguel Canala Echeverria. The delegation met in Dhaka with the Minister of Agriculture of Bangladesh Mrs. Matia Chowdhury. On this occasion both parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation in the areas of agricultural and livestock. This is the first ever mission from the Chilean Agricultural Sector to embark in a working visit to Bangladesh. Under the framework of the recently signed bilateral Memorandum of Understanding, Chile and Bangladesh will further strengthen their bilateral cooperation focused on: advancement of technical expertise, embrace cutting edge sanitary practices to the benefit of farm animals in Bangladesh, as well as cooperation in a broad range of issues pertaining to agriculture and food industry. Chilean producers and businesses are currently exporting small quantities of fruits and exotic wood logs that are used for furniture and construction. The main goal of the Chilean agricultural experts' delegation was to strengthen the presence of Chilean fruit products in the Bangladeshi markets. [7]

On July 29, 2011 the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs in the Government of Chile Mr. Fernando Schmidt welcomed the Foreign Affairs Secretary of Bangladesh Mr. Mohamed Mijarul Quayes. Both diplomats had a working lunch and discussed topics of bilateral interest. On this occasion both parties signed a bilateral agreement for the elimination of visas for diplomatic, official and service passports of the citizens from Chile and Bangladesh. [8]

Bangladesh and Paraguay: absent bilateral cooperation

On September 26th, 2014 the Paraguayan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Eladio Loizaga participated at the meeting of "Strengthening International Peace Operations" organized within the framework of the 69th General Assembly of United Nations in New York under the leadership of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina Wazed and Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of United Nations. [9]

Furthermore, Ambassador Loizaga attended the Ministerial Meeting of the Alliance of Civilizations held in New York and also participated in the Annual Meeting of the Group of 77 + China. Both countries, Paraguay and Bangladesh are members of the Group of 77 at the United Nations. Both nations constantly have participated on Global Organizations especially in the United Nations General Assemblies and UNESCO; however the current Government of Paraguay has not apparently been proactive towards strengthening the bilateral cooperation with Dhaka. [10]

On February 24, 2014, the Ambassador of Paraguay in UNESCO Mrs. Julia Velilla Laconich gave a conference about the Guarani Language on the occasion of the Native Language Day. Ambassador Laconich's presentation was followed with a great interest by the Ambassador of Bangladesh to France and the Permanent Envoy to UNESCO, Ambassador Shahidul Islam. The Guarani language is one of the two official languages in Paraguay and is the only Pre – Colombian written language that was preserved in the Americas thanks to the Jesuit missions in Paraguay. [11]

On May 5, 2016, the Permanent Mission of Paraguay to the UN was elected on a two year mandate (2016-2018) to join the committee of the United Nations Population Award together with Bangladesh. [12] This was another missed opportunity for Paraguayan officials to reach out to the Representatives of the Government of Bangladesh and establish a fluid dialogue.

Over the last three years there have been ample opportunities for both nations to establish a constant bilateral dialogue as their government representatives attend the UN General Assemblies every year in New York and major events in other countries. The four abovementioned multilateral conferences held in New York and Paris, during the last two years, were a great opportunity for the Paraguayan delegation to break the ice and start a new chapter on the Bangladesh-Paraguay partnership.

Bangladesh and Paraguay are tremendously affected by climate change, including: an increase of rainfall, deforestation, draught, poor infrastructure of water sewage systems, food security and shortage of agricultural production. The current disadvantages towards climate change are priorities that require both countries, Bangladesh and

Paraguay, to exchange their experiences in order to better handle upcoming natural disasters.

Bangladesh is home of the largest delta in the world, in the same vein Paraguay is home of the largest dam in the world (Itaipú Dam, the largest hydroelectric dam in the world based on its production capacity). [13] Bangladesh has over 700 rivers and has some of the world's largest mangrove forests; Paraguayan territory has a large number of small and large rivers, including the Paraguay and Parana Rivers, Acaray River among others and is lingering from a massive scale of deforestation throughout its territory. [14] Paraguay is home of the Guarani Aquifer, the world's largest underground fresh water resource which is untapped and is running a serious risk of being contaminated. [15]

In addition to the promotion and exchange of high level official visits to Dhaka and Asuncion, Bangladesh and Paraguay can pursue an open and intensive bilateral dialogue despite their geographic distances. Some of the areas where both countries may benefit are: exchange of successful experiences on how to effectively manage natural disasters; improvement of agricultural engineering and production; promotion of renewable energy resources; establishment of a bilateral committee that would set forth bilateral negotiations in order to reach a Bilateral Free Trade Agreement; establish a Bangladesh-Paraguay Business Forum. Moreover, the National Senate of Asuncion must immediately establish the Bangladesh – Paraguay Friendship Committee, so that both legislative branches in the two governments can exchange legislative - constitutional experiences and promote human rights, transparency and democratic institutions.

Conclusion

The Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh must ripe the fruits of globalization, free trade propensity, regional commercial institutions and continue to strengthen its bilateral ties with the Latin American Governments of Argentina, Chile and Paraguay. Dhaka must be invited by the member states of Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) to have an observer status in this regional trade block (established in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay). MERCOSUR's Common Market Council must embrace an open policy towards Bangladesh and

immediately begin the negotiations process of Free Trade Agreement between MERCOSUR and the Government of Bangladesh. [16] The Southern Common Market has a vast experience in negotiating such commercial and trade agreements. Based on the current steady economic growth of Bangladesh it is in the best interest of MERCOSUR Common Market Council to strengthen its partnership with Bangladesh. A proactive bi-regional strategy – that has been missing for decades – would positively complement the bilateral friendship of Bangladesh with the three nations respectively studied above: Argentina, Chile and Paraguay.

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