GS-II: Delhi needs to do more to protect and deepen ties with Dhaka.

Context

Sheikh Hasina made a four-day official visit to India.

Joint statement

- The joint statement contained mutual appreciation for steps taken in various fields and outlines of what is intended in the use of ports and connectivity, water sharing, power, gas, education, culture, defence.
- For Bangladesh, the reference to the plight of the “forcibly displaced” persons of Rakhine in Myanmar is a positive development.
- The joint statement lacked the vision of the one issued after Hasina’s visit in 2010. The effort then was to raise the relationship after a dark period of suspicion and hostility.

From the meet

- Bangladesh PM articulated points critical for the future welfare of South Asia.
- To move beyond the majority-minority mindset… Pluralism has been the strength. To celebrate South Asia’s diversities in religion, ethnicity and language.
- To manage geopolitical realities through friendship and collaboration. To balance regional political realities for the interest of people.

Bangladesh – internal picture:

- After two terms in power, there would be a degree of public apathy towards the Awami League government.
- There’s also a steady increase in the GDP, improvement in all parameters of economic activity as also law and order.
- The committed pushback against jihadi activities supported from foreign shores.

Trouble in India-Bangladesh relations

- The National Register of Citizens has been a worry for Bangladesh. Given the impoverished and uneducated status of those affected, it is questionable how the levels of appeal can be accessed.
- The NRC, to be extended to all of India may eventually fall-out on Bangladesh and Indo-Bangladesh relations.

What Bangladesh delivered

- The Ganga Waters Agreement had removed an intractable problem permanently vitiating the relationship.
- The Land and Maritime Boundary Agreements were of mutual benefit.
- Bangladesh has comprehensively addressed Indian concerns with regard to support to militant elements in the North-east.

India

- It continues to be unable to deliver on Teesta.
The Ganga Barrage project in Bangladesh carries economic advantages as well as political overtones but has not been addressed with suitable despatch by India to enable Bangladesh to obtain external funding.

Delay in implementation of the BBIN is inexplicable.

Way ahead

- India should not be perceived as committed to the Awami League.
- India’s perceived quasi-support to the BNP prior to the 2001 elections and its consequences should not be forgotten.
- India’s internal aberrations should not derail the one substantive relationship we have developed in the neighbourhood.