

CHITTAGONG PORT



Issue

India has been offered the Chittagong port for business by the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Haseena.

Background

The offer was made during the visit of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to Bangladesh.

Details

- The move of giving access to Chittagong port would benefit India's northeastern states, particularly Assam and Tripura.
- Meghalaya and Mizoram also could benefit immensely from getting access to the Chittagong port located near the eastern coast.

History of trade in north-east

- Before independence, the Chittagong port could be easily accessed through the Brahmaputra and Barak river system.
- The route was used to transport coal, timber, tea and oil from northeastern part, especially Assam, to other regions.
- Souring of ties between India and East Pakistan affected the trade routes. The 1965 war completely cut off India's access to these ports.
- The trade volume from Assam and northeast dipped significantly as transporting through Siliguri corridor became a costly affair.

Post-Bangladesh liberation

- Creation of Bangladesh did not immediately revive the traditional river and land trade and communication routes for the Northeast.
- The mistrust started to reduce after the Awami League government took charge in 2009 and the dispute-ending land boundary agreement was signed in 2015.
- Ties were strengthened after introduction of bus service between Agartala and Kolkata via Dhaka. Similar transit movement for goods has been tested.

Implications

- The move would benefit government's Act East policy by helping in developing northeast as a hub for eastern trade.
- The traditional northeast trade route, culminating at the Chittagong port, could be revived and help in boosting economic development in the region.

Measures to improve infrastructure

- The government has inaugurated the Maitri Setu built over the Feni River in Tripura. This has reduced distance between southern Tripura and Chittagong port.
- Roads have been constructed in Meghalaya's Dawki, southern Assam's Sutarkandi and Tripura's Akhaura linking eastern and south-eastern Bangladesh.

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