

Staff Reporter

Experts at a seminar in Dhaka on Monday observed that mistrust about India among Bangladeshis is growing as various important bilateral issues, especially the Teesta water sharing deal and ratification of Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between the two neighboring countries, have long remained unsolved.

They said both sides, especially India, should come up to immediately address the issues, including stopping killings by BSF along the border, to remove the mistrust and anti-Indian sentiment.

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) arranged the international seminar, titled ‘Contemporary Thoughts on Bangladesh-India Relations: Challenges and Opportunities’, in the city.

Experts from both Bangladesh and India took part in the daylong seminar held at BIISS auditorium.

Addressing the seminar, Sitaram Sharma, Chairman of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), said India needs to play a more important, proactive and leading role in improving, strengthening and consolidating bilateral relations with Bangladesh.

“India should look for an equal partnership, not insisting on special relationship,” he said adding, “It’s Delhi’s challenge to reassure Bangladesh... and to do so in a way that builds the largest political consensus for mutual trust. Anti-India feelings have existed in Bangladesh to some extent since the Independence struggle, especially in its military circles.”

Sharma said the Indo-Bangla trade issues need to be bilaterally discussed in a holistic fashion saying that continuous trade deficit with India has led to perception in Bangladesh that it is the result of India’s interest in preservation of its market by discouraging exports from Bangladesh. Maj Gen (ret) Abdur Rashid, Executive Director of the Institute of Conflict, Law and Development Studies, said practical approaches are needed to remove problems and mistrust that lie in the bilateral ties.

About trans-boundary rivers, he said, “Time has come to take a regional approach for the management of the river basins.”

Senior Bangladeshi journalist Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury said India should stop killings along the border. “The firing on the friendly border leaves impacts on the people of Bangladesh,” he said. MAKAIAS Director Radha Datta made a presentation on Connectivity, Transit and Border Management and said the achievement of goals will not be possible if Bangladesh does not address the core issue of security concern. “India has now realized that they are keeping very silly guts in the hands. They need to open transit for Bangladesh.”

Former ambassador Muhammad Zamir said India cannot divert the water flow of common rivers and kill people on the border as per international laws. “You can arrest them, catch them, but don’t kill them. They aren’t anti-Indians. It’s totally unexpected,” he said pointing at Indian authorities.

Registrar of East West University Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury made a presentation on Bangladesh-India security cooperation.

To address the security concern along the border, he suggested implementation of LBA, joint patrol by the border forces on both sides to curb smuggling and trafficking, working out how to legalize cattle trade, relaxation of visa regime to encourage people to travel with valid documents, joint patrol over maritime boundary to check piracy and smuggling.

BISS chairman ex-ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad presided over the opening session of the seminar, while BISS Director General Maj Gen SM Shafiuddin Ahmed and ex-Ambassador Farooq Sobhan, President of Bangladesh Enterprises Institute chaired the two other sessions.