



The Need for Recalibrating India–Bangladesh Current Relations in the Post-Hasina Politics and Post-Operation Sindoor Era

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ABSTRACT

India and Bangladesh have long shared strong historical, cultural, and economic ties, with India playing a key role in Bangladesh's independence in 1971. For years, under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, the two countries enjoyed a stable and cooperative relationship. But things have started to shift since she departed from power in 2025, especially after the "Sindoor Operation," which has brought a sense of uncertainty to the relationship. With new political voices emerging in Dhaka and growing domestic pressures, Bangladesh's foreign policy is beginning to take a different direction. The interim government, now led by Muhammad Yunus, is rethinking its strategic priorities, moving closer to China and Pakistan while re-evaluating ties with India. In this context, this paper looks at how India-Bangladesh relations are evolving after Hasina's exit and the fallout from the Sindoor Operation. It also offers suggestions on how the two countries can rebuild trust and renew their long-standing friendship.

KEYWORDS: Diplomatic recalibration, India-Bangladesh current relations, Sheik Hasina, Sindoor Operation.

1. Introduction

India has shared a close relationship with Bangladesh's Awami League, largely because of the party's central role in the 1971 Liberation War and its leadership in the years that followed. While this close association has helped India protect its strategic interests, but it has also created a sense of exclusion among other political groups and parts of the Bangladeshi public. Sheikh Hasina's extended rule further strengthened India's position in Bangladesh, but at the same time it has also reinforced the perception that India was favoring one political party.¹ Hasina's leadership played a significant role in maintaining a period of stability and strong cooperation between the two countries. However, her exit from office has opened up

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a new chapter with uncertainty and new challenges. These challenges are shaped by shifting political dynamics, changing geopolitics, and growing regional security concerns. A change in leadership could lead to a rethink of the priorities that have defined India-Bangladesh ties over the past decade especially if the new government chooses to pursue a more independent or less India-aligned path. This paper looks at where India-Bangladesh relations stand today, and how Sheikh Hasina's leadership and the controversial "Sindoor Operation" are shaping the future of this important bilateral relationship.

2. The Hasina Factor Strains India-Bangladesh Ties

During a conversation with Chatham House director Bronwen Maddox in London on June 11, 2025, Mr. Yunus touched on a range of topics from India-Bangladesh relations to the future of democracy in his country. When Maddox brought up an informal request Bangladesh had made to India for the extradition of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Yunus responded that the process was ongoing and stressed that his government wanted to handle it "legally and properly." When asked about India's unclear position regarding Hasina, Yunus said the public's frustration with her had now shifted toward India. "All the anger aimed at her is now being redirected at India because she's staying there."ⁱⁱ

3. The Islamist Resurgence in Bangladesh Post-Hasina and Its Implications for India

In the context of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina's presence in India remains a significant source of tension in bilateral relations. Although the interim government in Bangladesh, led by Muhammad Yunus, has requested her extradition to face charges related to alleged war crimes, India has not complied. India is particularly concerned about the possible rise of Islamist forces in a post-Hasina political landscape. During Hasina's time in power, many JI leaders were tried and even executed for war crimes. The party was banned, and hundreds of its members were jailed. But things are changing fast. Just days after taking office, Yunus lifted the ban on JI, signaling a comeback for the group. A former official from India's Ministry of External Affairs noted that such moves have given Islamists fresh momentum. Indian experts are increasingly voicing concerns about the rise of Islamist and anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh, warning that it poses risks to India's national security.ⁱⁱⁱ

4. Operation-Sindoor Affects India-Bangladesh Trades

Bangladesh has been restricting Indian exports at several key border points with the North-Eastern states, even though India has repeatedly raised the issue in official meetings. According to India, this has created serious challenges for the North-East's industrial growth. The region is facing a triple blow: high and



impractical transit fees imposed by Bangladesh, limited access to the rest of India for shipping its goods, and difficulties in getting raw materials despite existing transit agreements between the two countries. In response, India has introduced its own set of restrictions on Bangladeshi exports headed for the North-East and beyond. These new rules affect all major land customs stations and integrated check posts in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, as well as routes through Changrabandha and Fulbari in North Bengal. The restricted items include ready-made garments, wooden furniture, plastic and PVC products, soft drinks, baked goods, snacks, chips, confectionery, cotton yarn, and more.^{iv}

5. From Engagement to Estrangement

The India–Bangladesh relationship has entered one of its most turbulent phases in recent decades. What was once a partnership built on shared history and cooperation is now marked by growing mistrust, heated public statements, security and trade actions. The situation took a dramatic turn after India launched Operation Sindoor on May 2025 in response to the Pahalgam terror attack. Though aimed at Pakistan, the operation sent shockwaves through the region, especially across the border in Bangladesh. The fallout from Operation Sindoor has not only highlighted vulnerabilities in the bilateral relationship but also exposed deeper cracks in South Asia's regional stability. As the world's power balance changes, trust between India and Bangladesh's interim government is weakening. While outside influence matters, the main problem is that both sides are not handling their plans well.^v

6. Dhaka's Akash Bijoy Strategic Response to India's Teesta Prahar

India recently carried out a major military exercise called Teesta Prahar in the river areas of West Bengal, near the Bangladesh border. The use of advanced weapons and surveillance drones raised concerns in Dhaka, where it was perceived by Dhaka not as a defensive move against potential infiltration from Pakistan, but rather as a show of force intended to intimidate.^{vi} In reaction, Bangladesh took some unusual steps of its own. One of them was a large-scale air force exercise named *Akash Bijoy 2025*, held in April 2025. The aim was to demonstrate that the Bangladesh Air Force is ready for any situation and capable of responding strategically if needed. The Chief Adviser of Bangladesh's interim government, Muhammad Yunus, attended the drill and made a diplomatic remark: *"We live in a world where the threat of war is constant. India and Pakistan are always on the edge, and some say war could break out at any moment. In that kind of situation, staying unprepared would be tantamount to suicide."*^{vii}



7. India's Pushback of Illegal Immigrants Post-Pahalgam Attack

Since Operation Sindoor began on May 7, 2025 India has sent back over 2,500 suspected illegal Bangladeshi migrants across the border. What makes this operation different is how quickly and widely it is being carried out. The government has given a 30-day deadline to verify migrants, and those found to be illegal are being flown by Indian Air Force planes from various states to the border. This has raised concerns about legal procedures, human rights, and court cases especially with reports of people being left in the no man's land between India and Bangladesh. Although the issue of illegal immigration has always existed, deportations have increased after the April 22, 2025 terror attack in Pahalgam and the launch of Operation Sindoor. States like Gujarat, Delhi, Assam, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan are rounding up illegal migrants and sending them to border points in Assam, Tripura, and Meghalaya. From there, the Border Security Force (BSF) pushes them back across the border.^{viii}

8. Bangladesh's Growing Ties with China Post-Hasina Government and the Challenge to Indian Influence

Since the caretaker government took office in Bangladesh, the country has been drawing closer to China, especially through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which focuses heavily on infrastructure and investment. As China makes its presence felt in the region, India's influence in Bangladesh is starting to face real competition particularly in areas like trade, energy, and development projects. With Bangladesh increasingly relying on China for funding and support, there's growing concern in India that this could shift the balance of power in the region.^{ix} What is more concerned for India is the warm relationship developing between China and Bangladesh's Islamist groups. A clear example of this came when Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen hosted a reception for leaders of parties like Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefazat-e-Islam at the Chinese Embassy in Dhaka.^x

Further, Bangladesh's interim government chief adviser, Muhammad Yunus, stirred controversy during his recent visit to China by suggesting that South Asia could become an extension of the Chinese economy. Pointing to India's northeastern states often called the "Seven Sisters" he said that the region is landlocked and doesn't have direct access to the sea. Yunus said Bangladesh is the only nearby country with a coastline, which opens up major opportunities for connectivity and economic integration, especially with China.^{xi} In a candid interview with Xinhua on March 28, 2025, Yunus described China as a close and trusted partner, saying, "It's very important that we see China as our good friend... Our relationship has been very strong over the years. Our business ties are solid, and we truly benefit from working together."^{xii} Relations between



Dhaka and Beijing appear to have grown closer after Sheikh Hasina stepped down as Bangladesh's prime minister and fled to India in August 2024.^{xiii} Bangladesh is reportedly looking into buying Chinese J-10 and JF-17 fighter jets the same ones Pakistan used during its clashes with India^{xiv}. As 2025 marks 50 years of diplomatic ties between China and Bangladesh, and has been named the "China-Bangladesh People-to-People Exchange Year," Hossain's visit to China comes at a symbolic moment. His trip highlights the strong bond between the two countries and Bangladesh's interest in strengthening that relationship further. It also sends a clear message that changes in Bangladesh's domestic politics won't affect its growing ties with China.^{xv}

9. A Strategic Recalibration between Pakistan-Bangladesh Engagement and Its Impact on India

India is concerned that growing Islamist influence in Bangladesh could help Pakistan gain more power there. These worries increased after a Pakistani cargo ship docked at Chittagong port for the first time in over 50 years with shipments of sugar and potatoes, goods that Bangladesh typically imports from India, possibly opening the door to more trade between the two countries.^{xvi} At the same time, the interim government has accused India of interfering in Bangladesh by supporting Sheikh Hasina, even as it works to build closer ties with Pakistan, its longtime rival. Trade between Bangladesh and Pakistan is picking up rising nearly 27% as both countries look to diversify their economic relationship. To that end, they signed an MoU on January 13, 2025, to launch a joint business council.^{xvii} In April 2025, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch visited Dhaka, marking the first high-level diplomatic exchange between Pakistan and Bangladesh in 15 years. As a gesture of goodwill, Pakistan offered 300 scholarships to Bangladeshi students.^{xviii}

10. India Must Rethink Its Bangladesh Policy as Dhaka Drifts

Since the Awami League's fall from power, India has been increasingly concerned about the growing wave of anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh. A lot of this anger seems to be stirred up by outside forces, including extremist groups operating near the border with Northeast India. What's more worrying for India is that this hostility is being actively exploited by foreign players especially Pakistan's ISI and other cross-border elements that see an opportunity to strain the relationship between the two countries even further.^{xix} Concerned by the growing violence against minorities, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Dhaka in December 2024. During his one-day trip, he raised the issue directly with Bangladeshi officials, urging them to act and to protect the Hindu community. Despite this diplomatic engagement, the attacks on Hindus persisted, with 76 incidents reported between late November 2024 and late January 2025.^{xx}



11. Bangladesh Eyes Historic Elections in April 2026 amid Diplomatic Reassurances

Bangladesh will hold its next general elections in the first half of April 2026, and this is expected to keep India-Bangladesh relations on a positive track once a new government is formed. In a speech before Eid-ul-Azha, Yunus said the Election Commission will soon share a detailed plan. He added that the government has talked with all political parties to ensure the elections are free, fair, and competitive. "After reviewing reforms in justice and elections, I want to tell the people that the next national elections will take place in the first half of April 2026," he said.^{xxi} Supradip Chakma, Adviser to Bangladesh's Interim Government, said India and Bangladesh have shared friendly ties since Bangladesh's independence. He stressed the importance of staying engaged and working together for the progress of both nations and their people.^{xxii} Sheikh Hasina's exit has changed the way Bangladesh and India relate to each other. While it has brought some hidden tensions to light, it also gives both countries a chance to build a fairer and more inclusive relationship. By learning from the past and focusing on the future, they can work together with respect, trust, and shared goals.^{xxiii}

12. The way forward

Though some challenges are to be expected, the post-Hasina period also opens up new opportunities to take India-Bangladesh relations to the next level. As both countries navigate shared regional and global issues, there's plenty of scope to work more closely together. To keep the relationship moving in a positive direction, it's important to focus on a few key areas though these aren't the only ones that matter.

12.1 Rethinking India-Bangladesh Ties beyond the Awami League

The current diplomatic deadlock between India and Bangladesh shows it's time to rethink the relationship. India's long-standing support for the Awami League has, over time, distanced other important political groups in Bangladesh. To rebuild trust and strengthen ties, India needs to take a more inclusive approach one that reaches out to opposition parties, civil society, and people at the grassroots.

12.2 Strengthening India-Bangladesh Ties through Mutual Respect and Cooperation

The way forward lies in recognizing the deep ties historical, cultural, and geographical that binds the two countries. Both sides need to focus on resolving difficult issues through trust and dialogue, while working together in areas where they can both gain, like trade, energy, and climate change. By approaching the



relationship this way, India and Bangladesh can not only stabilize their ties but also unlock new opportunities for collaboration in the region and beyond.

12.3. Recalibrating Border Haats as Co-Prosperity Zones

India and Bangladesh could explore the possibility of upgrading select Border Haats into Border Co-Prosperity Zones (BCZs). Successful haats like Kamlasagar in Tripura and Balat in Meghalaya could serve as pilot locations, enhancing not just cross-border trade but also offering healthcare services to support medical tourism. A joint study between the two nations can help identify the most viable haats for this development. These BCZs could span across both sides of the border and be enclosed areas either naturally or with a perimeter fence. The idea would be to pick scenic spots that are easy to reach from nearby towns and have cultural or natural appeal.

12.4 Strengthening India-Bangladesh Ties through Cultural and People-to-People Ties

Efforts like the India-Bangladesh Cultural Exchange Program and youth diplomacy can go a long way in bridging political differences and building a stronger, more people-centred relationship between the two countries. Academic institutions should hold regular student exchange programs to foster mutual understanding among young people. Sports events, especially in popular games like cricket and football, can also create lasting bonds among the youth.

12.5 Reinforcing Joint Military Exercise

The Bangladesh-India joint military exercise “Sampriti” is part of a regular, ongoing effort to strengthen cooperation between the two countries. The exercise focuses on counter-terrorism and improving how the two armies work together on the ground. Since 2009, both sides have also held direct Army-to-Army staff talks, helping to build trust and coordination. Continued participation by a contingent of the Bangladesh Armed Forces in India’s Republic Day Parade, as seen in 2021, would serve as a symbolic and visible reaffirmation of the longstanding military partnership between the two countries, reinforcing their cooperation in the years ahead.

12.6 India-Bangladesh Trade and Development Prospects

For India, building stronger economic ties with Bangladesh is a chance to grow its trade links, secure reliable energy sources, and boost infrastructure especially in the eastern and northeastern parts of the country. By expanding the India-Bangladesh Trade and Transport Agreement, both countries can unlock



new economic opportunities and strengthen their partnership. Working together on projects in power, technology, and pharmaceuticals could also lead to more meaningful and long-lasting economic cooperation.

13. Conclusion

As Bangladesh moves into a new political era beyond Sheikh Hasina's leadership, India must adopt a forward-looking and inclusive strategy to maintain continuity and stability in their bilateral relationship. The strong foundations built during Hasina's tenure characterized by robust economic ties, security collaboration, and enhanced regional connectivity now need to be institutionalized to endure political shifts. India should extend its engagement beyond political affiliations, placing greater emphasis on strengthening civil society ties and fostering long-term development partnerships that reflect Bangladesh's national goals. Critical issues such as water-sharing, border security, and trade disparities require renewed diplomatic focus guided by mutual respect and realistic cooperation. Moreover, India must handle sensitive matters like migration and religious freedoms with deeper empathy and regional awareness. In a changing geopolitical landscape, ensuring a stable, sovereign, and prosperous Bangladesh is in India's strategic interest, and a thoughtful balanced approach will be key to sustaining this important partnership in the future

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