

Reconfiguring Bangladesh–India Diplomacy: Strategic Realignment in the Post–July Revolution Context

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Abstract: This study uses the analytical lenses of reliance, strategic autonomy, and regional engagement to look at how Bangladesh-India relations have changed after the July-August Revolution of Bangladesh in 2024. The study examines how patterns of cooperation and constraint have changed in response to shifting political alignments, economic interdependence, and Bangladesh's desire for more foreign policy autonomy. It does this by placing the bilateral relationship within a historical trajectory from 1971 to the present. The study identifies important structural factors influencing the relationship, such as water diplomacy, border security, trade imbalances, and political leverage, by using qualitative analysis of secondary sources, including academic literature, policy documents, government statements, and reliable media reports. Findings suggests that although economic and geographic proximity continue to promote cooperation, enduring asymmetries limit Bangladesh's strategic autonomy and occasionally upset bilateral stability, with wider ramifications for South Asian peace and security. According to the study, recalibrating Bangladesh-India ties necessitates a shift away from reliance and towards more varied diplomatic engagement, increased involvement in regional and multilateral forums, and more skillful application of soft power. It emphasizes even more how crucial it is for India to ensure long-term regional stability through constructive and sovereignty-respecting engagement. This study adds to discussions on asymmetric interdependence and regional order in South Asia by providing a historically grounded and analytically nuanced assessment. It also offers policy-relevant suggestions for promoting a more equitable and long-lasting bilateral partnership.

Keywords: Bangladesh-India Relations, Diplomatic Strategies, July Revolution, Regional Stability, Socio-political Dynamics, and Economic Cooperation

1. Introduction

Bangladesh and India two countries of South Asia have a complicated and changing relationship formed by geography, history, and politics. Bangladesh became a new Bengali nation-state after independence in 1971, whereas India is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual federation. Despite their inequality of power, the two countries continue to be bound by long-standing historical, linguistic, and cultural ties, as well as interdependent political and economic interests. Since Bangladesh became independent, the pattern of bilateral relations has changed repeatedly, marked by cooperation and

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disagreement, as well as geopolitical and strategic adjustments. The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Peace in 1972, which underscored the importance of upholding sovereignty and territorial integrity, gave rise to feelings of mutual solidarity and gratitude in the early years after independence under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. However, in 1975, the relationship began to deteriorate further with the introduction of political instability and a military government, particularly with respect to border management, cross-border migration, and security cooperation. During this time, while India would be willing to provide economic assistance, political instability in the country would inhibit deeper bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India from 1975 to 1990. The follow-up democratization of governments brought relative normalization of ties. The formalization of one of the most contentious treaties in the South Asia region on shared transnational resources in the form of the 1992 Ganges Water Sharing Treaty has been touted as an important diplomatic relations for Bangladesh. In last fifteen years, developments in connectivity, economic liberalization, and energy cooperation have included the 2015 Land Boundary Agreement and various investments and infrastructure projects across borders. However, trade volumes grew considerably; there are still disparities since Bangladesh's imports from India dwarfed its exports.

The Revolution and dissolution of Sheikh Hasina's government has placed relations between the two countries into a new cycle of uncertainty. Under the interim government led by Dr. Muhammad Yunus changes appear afoot indicating a move to a more independent and well-rounded approach to foreign policy. Therefore, Bangla-Indo relationship is testing a historical moment ahead of critical challenges and affirming uncertainties. These challenges not only ensuring regional investment but also cover border management, trade imbalance, water resource management, and security cooperation. At the end, the Revolution of July 2024 delivers a rare opportunity for a cautious reassessment of bilateral relations that places mutual respect, a strategic relationship between each other, and mutual security in a regional context ahead of dependency-based relations.

2. Literature Review

The development of tripartite relations between Bangladesh and India has attracted considerable attention as a subject, and across different times and periods, represented significant changes in political, diplomatic and regional realities. Selim (2009) offers an early, focused retrospective on the first decade (1971-1981) of post-independence, especially in terms of the linkages between Bangladesh and India tied to the development of bilateral diplomacy. His articulation largely characterized the relationship as a cooperative but fragile one, as a cooperative period existed surrounding refugee management and early trade agreements, but challenged by boundary-drawing tensions and water-sharing disputes. In terms of a broader historical perspective, Ahmed (2008) engaged with Bangladesh-India relations in terms of South Asian regional realities, counter-balancing that border security, trade relations and trans-boundary resources management have shaped consistent sets of options for the foreign policy-maker in Dhaka.

Sobhan (2006) offered another perspective, using emerging policymakers' voices of Bangladesh-India Dialogue: Vision of Young Leaders to suggest a generational approach to engagement and create a degree of narrative, dialogue-based diplomacy to create meaningful and potentially sustaining cooperation. Akter (2021) amplifies the narratives, scopes and opportunities by following the past and present of connection, citing major recent developments as the 2014 agreement on maritime boundaries and increasing cooperation in trade and security interests. Her study mainly indicates that Bangladesh increasingly prefers bilateral means in dealing with strategic and economic uncertainty rather than regional means. McGovern (2018) goes on to develop the narrative with ongoing border-related issues exchanging enclaves, illegal immigration, and smuggling that continue to develop in the absence of any formal diplomatic progress. Likewise, Rahman (2023) provides a recent empirical study to develop the narrative of ongoing border-related tensions including violence and human trafficking till undermining the stability of bilateral relations, notwithstanding the growing economic ties.

Both Dutta (2010) and Akter (2021) frame similar trade, transit, and water-sharing issues that stress the need for reciprocal trust, as well as institutional cooperation, as prerequisites for sustainable peace. In more recent literature, such as the Institute of South Asian Studies (2024), these aspects are placed in a new political context, following Bangladesh's 2024 Quota Reform Movement, which argues that domestic political events are influencing current approaches to foreign policy towards India. These viewpoints appear to fall along a continuum, as academic conceptualization has progressed from issues of diplomacy and structural conflict in the post-independence period (Selim, 2009; Ahmed, 2008), to present-day political conditions and pragmatic cooperation (Akter, 2021; Rahman, 2023; Institute of South Asian Studies, 2024).

3. Study Objectives

This research has pursued the following analytical objectives: analyzing the evolution of Bangladesh-India relations through the lens of dependence, Bangladesh's strategic autonomy, and regional engagement.

1. To analyze the evolving elements of cooperation for Bangladesh-India relations in the post-July Revolution, considering (a) changing political positions and alignments; (b) a changing model of economic interdependence; and (c) a shift toward a balancing strategy and increased autonomy in its foreign relations.
2. To analyze structural conditions like water diplomacy, border security, trade deficits, and political leverage that constrain Bangladesh-India relations.
3. Recommendations for policy and strategies to strengthen Bangladesh's diplomatic independence and regional engagement, the emphasis should focus on (a) diversification of the scope of relations; (b) engagement in regional and multilateral spaces; and (c) more robust and increased use of soft power diplomacy to normalize key bilateral relations and support sustainable development in the region.

4. Methodology

This study employs qualitative research approaches to examine the evolving nature of Bangladesh-India relations after the July Revolution. It situates the analysis historically and implements analytical frameworks to consider the evolution of each state bilateral relation from 1971 to the present and the evolving character of their approach to relations. This study utilized secondary data, which includes academic texts, peer-reviewed journals, reports and policy documents, government documentation, press briefings, and trustworthy media. The chosen sources were analyzed and closely read to study the major themes developments and shifts over time in Bangladesh-India bilateral relations, especially after the July Revolution. While the study has a predominance of qualitative data, it does have some quantitative data particularly related to trade coverage and economic data, to help provide context and a degree of empirical validity if needed. The methodology of context analysis was employed to study the nature of the bilateral changing relations after July revolution, as they can be situational assessed relative to bigger historical processes and geopolitical changes over time. An analysis and understanding of the unique interaction of structural elements, political context, and geopolitical dynamics are more fully evaluated from a historical narrative and qualitative perspective.

5. Conceptual Framework

5.1 Diplomacy

Diplomacy is a primary branch of international relationships among countries that centers on the art and practice of diplomacy between states and other international actors. Diplomacy involves the activities undertaken by states pursue their foreign policy goals more broadly (Sarkar, 2025). Within the international system, diplomacy is the most common way that actors communicate with each other, negotiate settlements, and reduce conflict to mutual or strategic ends. It involves a spectrum of techniques including dialogue, persuasion, compromise, or sometimes even coercion to create influence and a different set of behavior among states.

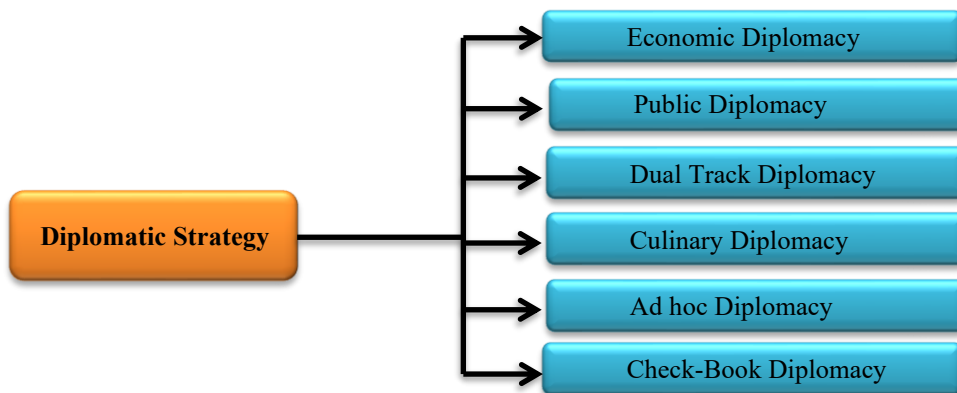
The term diplomacy was first used by the Irish philosopher Edward Burke in 1796, from the French word, *diplomatic* (Mia, 2022). Through history, the development of diplomacy has matched the global changing landscape especially in the medieval and modern periods when empires, religions and ideologies expanded and declined, and colonialism reconstructed the international system and its actors. Subsequently, Diplomacy is not a singular term but a diverse and flexible practice that responds to global changing circumstances. Recent analysis has identified a distinction between traditional diplomacy and modern diplomacy. While traditional diplomacy has primarily been state-centered, top-secret exchanges, modern diplomacy now also uses additional instruments, including digital channels, social media involvement, and public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005). The addition of these instruments has increased transparency, enabled participatory governance, and allowed the involvement of multiple non-state actors, such as international organizations, civil societies, and multinational companies (Mia, 2022). Furthermore, contemporary diplomacy is not conducted purely or primarily on behalf of

political or security issues, but has also expanded to meet challenges globally, such as human rights, cyber security and climate change, often in the form of international cooperation and organizations (Melissen, 2005). It is important to build diplomatic strategy under this premise, in order to begin systematically engaging in the ways that states enter into relationship and conversation in order to express and pursue their objectives in a complex, globally integrated world.

5.1.1 Diplomatic Strategy

Diplomatic strategy refers to a conscious collection of methods and strategies employed by states and diplomats to influence the interests, decisions, actions, and behaviors of other countries and international actors. States utilize several mechanisms to pursue their diplomacy including negotiation, trading, coalition building, using international organizations, economic inducement or sanctions, and possibly military influence. Ultimately, the goal of a diplomatic strategy is to protect, promote, or project a country's interest while mitigating conflict and fostering cooperation. Diplomatic strategies may take various forms, as a result of the context, purpose, and resource availability, and may be modified over time to address changing conditions in international relations.

Figure 01: Types of Diplomatic Strategy



Source: authors, 2025

Diplomatic strategies consist of various means, methods, and practices that states use to secure and promote their national interests in the international sphere. Economic diplomacy is more focused on promoting the country's economic goals, including increasing exports, bringing in foreign investment, lowering trade deficits, obtaining international loans, providing expanded access to markets, and developing industries like tourism (Mia, 2022). Modern-day diplomacy involves engaging not just foreign governments, but also the larger public including civil society, not-for-profits, business sectors, and the media through what is known as public diplomacy. Public diplomacy uses public discourse to acknowledge, showcase, and promote the accomplishments of a state using seminars, workshops, publications, and publically accessible media campaigns that not only inform, but informally promote the country's international reputation. In the

21st century, there is also an effort of Track II, or dual-track diplomacy, which uses official and non-official processes and means to keep working diplomatic relations. Track II goes even further to both facilitate direct government-to-government discussions found in the first track, and at the second track level engage non-state actors such as multinational corporations, private, or think-tanks acting as agents to promote dialogue and diplomacy. Specialized forms of diplomacy have also emerged. Culinary diplomacy, also known as gastro-diplomacy or food diplomacy uses cultural and culinary engagement, during the course of official state visits, to help strengthen bilateral relations. Ad hoc diplomacy indicates to temporarily assigning diplomatic tasks to individuals outside the professional diplomatic corps, a strategy often employed by resource-rich states to conduct specific missions. Similarly, checkbook diplomacy connects using financial aid, loans, or investment to bring another state into one's strategic orbit, sometimes exerting control over critical infrastructure or territory (Wendt, 1999).

5.2 Dependency Viewpoints

In the 1950s, after the Second World War and the rush of decolonization, many scholars of the West put forth ideas of development theory to explain the socioeconomic situation of newly independent countries (Prebisch, 1950). Among these was modernization theory, one of the more prominent frameworks. This theory suggests that the underdevelopment of post-colonial countries is ultimately due to several internal factors: the absence of capital; a lack of entrepreneurs; the absence of skilled laborers; poor infrastructure; low levels of educational achievement; and traditional ways of thinking. According to the theorists of modernization, all underdeveloped or post-colonial countries had to do was mimic the patterns of the West and use Western capital and expertise to achieve development. By the 1960s, a group of scholars from Latin America began to challenge this line of reasoning. By the 1970s and 1980s, they offered an alternative framework called dependency theory. Their central proponents, Paul Baran, Andre Gunder Frank, Raul Prebisch, Samir Amin, and Dos Santos, argued that underdevelopment was largely a consequence of external relations. They argued that by structural exploitation, developed countries restricted the development capabilities of developing countries, thereby keeping them in stages of dependent development (Prebisch, 1950). In the South Asian context, India surrounded by Bangladesh on three sides is used as an example of dependency. India has fueled bilateral tensions by interfering with issues such as the Farakka Barrage, incidents of cross-border violence, and its support for the separatist movement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, after 1971, to establish its superiority over Bangladesh. Because of this it is explored Bangladesh's dependency on India in several key areas. It is fact that geographically India is an inseparable for Bangladesh. India supported Bangladesh in various forms like financial support, infrastructure programs and related investments, energy supplies, education, health and cultural ties; all of which highlight a deeply layered bilateral relationship. However, through a dependency theory lens, India's substantial support contributes to a lopsided power relationship in which dependencies are reinforcing Bangladesh's increasing reliance on India for its development, economy and strategic context. The relationship has a collaborative facade, but creates structural dependencies in key areas (energy, trade, education and even the management of indigenous resources) that

contribute to Bangladesh's policy decision making and reduce its autonomous decision making ability. The structural dependencies between have developed historically over shared natural resources, the trade relationship and cultural ties. This serves as an example of how bilateral collaboration and support incite dependency while creating, or amplifying, structural vulnerabilities. Bangladesh's continued reliance on India is an example of the complicated realities of concurrent bilateral cooperation, dependency and strategic asymmetry in the case of a smaller state coping with the regional hegemony of a larger state.

5.3 Concept of Soft Power

Soft power refers to a country or actor's ability to persuade or influence others in a non-coercive fashion, rather than using forced or hard power (Nye, 2004). It is derived from things such as culture, values, diplomacy, education, and media essentially, anything that contributes to the perception of a country, or to relationships with others. It is a means for states to fulfil their own interests, cooperate with others, and improve their own image globally without the need for military or economic coercion. Conceptually, soft power can be understood through seven distinct dimensions, each of which can be inclusive of exemplifying foreign policy, cultural power, scientific and educational power, and media power and impact.

Figure 05: Pillars of Soft Power



Source: authors, 2025

Soft power is the ability of an entity or country to influence another country or actor through attraction and persuasion rather than coercive means or hard power (Nye, 2004). Soft power is based on factors such as culture, values, education, diplomacy and media, which shapes perceptions and helps build favorable relationships. Accordingly, states use soft power so that countries and actors engage in actions that advance their interests and help to promote their global reputation, without having to rely on hard power means such as military or economic coercion. Conceptually, soft power can be differentiating and understood by seven 'soft power pillars', which can be constructed around the concepts

of foreign policy, soft culture, social and open educational capacity, and media influence and outreach. Practically, soft power can be understood as the ability to colonize nations through diplomatic means. Just states use military or economic means to solve issues, soft power diplomacy is the ultimate means of engagement that helps to improve nation-to-nation relations, provide development assistance, and offer other cooperative forms of support in order to improve relations or outcomes. A middle-income country like Bangladesh is naturally constrained in its ability to engage in sanctions or coercive measures due to limited economic means, particularly when considering a situation like Myanmar with the Rohingya. Similarly, a middle-income country like Bangladesh has limited technological or military capacity, so direct military intervention is also not realistic. As a result, the primary instrument of Bangladesh's diplomatic strategy is the use of soft power that relies fundamentally upon diplomatic skill and engagement to strengthen international relationships and advance national interests.

5.4 Integration of the Concepts

During the postcolonial period of development studies, there was a lively debate about the causes of underdevelopment in the newly independent states. Modernization theory attributed underdevelopment to internal factors insufficient capital, weak infrastructure, poorly educated labor, and traditional beliefs in order to promote Western ideas for development (Prebisch, 1950). Although, modernization theory was criticized by school of Latin American scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, Paul Baran, Andre Gunder Frank, Raul Prebisch, Samir Amin, and Dos Santos created dependency theory. The dependency theory stated that structural exploitation from advanced economies restricted growth and perpetuated dependency. Bangladesh's relationship with India exemplifies this dynamic. India influences Bangladesh through the 'Farakka Barrage' tensions over water rights, cross-border killings, and support for separatism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Meanwhile, India provides development assistance in terms of loans and donations in the areas of finance, infrastructure, energy, education, health, and culture. This overt dependency keeps structural asymmetries intact, dictates Bangladesh's decision-making and undermines emerging autonomy; it is an overt dependency. Due to limited economic, technological, and military capabilities, Bangladesh's leaders know they cannot resort to coercion, and therefore they deploy soft power engaging in diplomatic, cultural, and educational relations to advance national interests, foster cooperation and relieve vulnerability. In this context, Bangladesh's clear strategic and political dependency on India reflects the concept of dependency theory, structural asymmetries and cultural diplomacy in South Asia. These models of small states in asymmetric relationships provide examples of how states establish influence within asymmetric regional relationships.

6. Bangladesh-India Relations: Post July Revolution Context

Bangladesh-India engagement has been one of the largest geopolitical and economic factors in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries are closely connected through their shared water resources, trade, agreements, and strategic interests. Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh-India relations have evolved-moving away from a primarily bilateral

engagement, and developing into a broader multilateral agenda. In this regard, Bangladesh is a relatively important partner within the region, as India's strategic interest is to maintain leverage in the Bay of Bengal, and particularly its northeastern "Seven Sister" states. Previous governments of Bangladesh have followed divergent paths: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman struggled to balance relations between the Saudi bloc and the Chinese; Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia assumed a position of control to anti-Indian, anti-Soviet position; Ershad remained largely neutral; and the Awami League, led by Sheikh Hasina, emphasized the consolidation of domestic power and aligned closely with India disruptive of regional balance (Kamruzzaman, 2018). Emerging from the July Revolution, Bangladesh-India relations have entered a new and complex phase, characterized by a process of rebalancing, diversification, and strategic equilibrium. The interim government of Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus has also demonstrated the desire to adjust the direction of Bangladesh's foreign policy, moving from one primarily oriented toward India to a more diffuse, multi-dimensional diplomatic approach that includes China, Pakistan and the various multilaterals. It marks a significant shift from the prior period, when under Sheikh Hasina Bangladesh aligned closely with New Delhi on political, economic and security issues. Within the context of Bangladesh-India relations, we can now explore a few factors that can enlarge the dynamics further between the two countries.

6.1 Strategic and Political Shift

The post-transition period represents a noticeable strategic recalibration in Bangladesh's foreign policy as compared to the diplomacy of the previous government, which was marked by strong political alignment and significant economic reliance with India alongside cautious engagement with China. In order to reduce structural reliance on any one partner, the present government has embraced a more diverse regional engagement policy, in contrast to previous administrations that placed a strong emphasis on strategic reassurance towards New Delhi. While greater engagement with Pakistan indicates a purposeful expansion of Bangladesh's strategic options, diplomatic and economic outreach to China has extended beyond infrastructure financing to include commerce, technology, and people-to-people collaboration. This change is an attempt to improve bargaining power and strategic autonomy in bilateral relations, especially with India. These developments are seen by New Delhi as weakening Bangladesh's previous support for India's "Neighborhood First" policy, possibly indicating a slow regional realignment with ramifications for India's influence in Dhaka and the larger balance of power in South Asia (Rahman, 2025).

6.2 Diplomatic Relations over Rivers

Water sharing is a key area of power asymmetry in Bangladesh-India relations. More than 230 transboundary rivers flow into Bangladesh, most originating from India, and the downstream location of Bangladesh creates structural dependence and vulnerability to India's upstream interventions. The construction of dams and diversions in important rivers such as the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Teesta shows India's leadership in hydro-politics, and India's control over regional water security. After the July Revolution,

Bangladesh's shift to multilateral basin diplomacy, as it interacts with India, Nepal, and China, indicates that Bangladesh recognizes the disproportionate power of water in river basin diplomacy has shifted, but it is acting in ways to recalibrate the asymmetry of power in bilateral water exchanges, with broader approaches toward cooperation surrounding water at the river basin level.

6.3 Economic Market Diversification

Bangladesh's economic strategy since the July Revolution demonstrates assertive retargeting of policy toward increasing regional economic housing. In the finalization effort to end its bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with India, and to pursue membership in the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Bangladesh's interim government shows a strong change toward multilateral engagement and a move away from bilateral dependence. The actions noted here represent a diplomatic maneuver by Bangladesh, characterized, as we noted in the discussion of transnational governance, by diversification of economic alternatives to assure that the country has alternative sources of investment and that alliances not connected to India emerge to strengthen its position globally in regional value chains. The consequence of this maneuver is the possible subjectivity of Bangladesh to the revise surrounding competitive regional advantage.

6.4 Security and Strategic Balance

The security cooperation has been a key aspect of Bangladesh-India relations particularly in terms of counterterrorism, border management, as well as counter-cross-border insurgencies. The post-Revolution regime appears willing to transform these arrangements in the interest of comforting its strategic autonomy and maintaining balance with respect to the region. Bangladesh is now interested in an emphasis on multilateral dialogues on security, maritime cooperation in the Bay of Bengal, and leadership in regional security dialogues more broadly to display its independence from asymmetric dependencies on security. The evolving posture toward India indicates Bangladesh's transition from junior security partner to an independent regional actor able to balance the interests of global powers while remaining committed to its national interest (Ali, 2018).

6.5 Diplomatic and Regional Implications

This moment in time after the July revolution is a revolutionary moment in Bangladesh–India relations, as Bangladesh is pursuing a pragmatic posture of engagement with all major actors, including India, China, and United States, and redefining its role in the Indo-Pacific. For India, this is both a challenge and an opportunity. That is, India's historical and exclusive influence has been diminished, but if the two counties can evolve together according to the unfolding strategic environment based on mutual respect and partnership, opportunities for genuine cooperation will improve. While India remains important and arguably indispensable because of historical, geographic, and cultural ties, Bangladesh is also, with great emphasis, pursuing a more diversified, balanced, and autonomous foreign policy, utilizing multilateral outreach, strategic diversification, and cooperative diplomacy to protect sovereign authority, economic interests, and regional stability. A comparative table summarizing Bangladesh's previous diplomacy with India

(pre-July Revolution, mainly under Sheikh Hasina) across key dimensions are shown below.

Table-1: Bangladesh–India Relations Before and After the July Revolution

Policy Domain	Pre-July Revolution	Post-July Revolution
Strategic Orientation	India-centric alignment that puts security and political assurance first.	Rebalancing in the direction of strategic balance and diverse relationships.
Diplomatic Modality	Asymmetric power relations predominate in bilateralism.	In order to counteract imbalance, multilateral involvement.
Political Alignment	Strong agreement with India on security and regional matters.	Collaboration based on issues rather than ideology
Economic Interdependence	Extensive reliance on India for transit, electricity, and trade.	Purposeful diversification of investment and trading partners.
Trade & Market Strategy	Bilateral trade frameworks with India are preferred.	Investigation of multilateral economic frameworks and regional trade blocs.
River & Water Diplomacy	Bilateral talks that strengthen the disparity between upstream and downstream.	Multilateral water diplomacy around the basin to adjust leverage.
Security Cooperation	Bangladesh is positioned as an emerging security partnership thanks to extensive cooperation.	Selective collaboration with a focus on autonomy and harmony.
Military & Strategy	Strategic hedging is limited and in line with Indian security preferences.	Balanced interactions with major countries and strategic hedging.
China Engagement	Politically limited involvement with an emphasis on development.	Extensive participation in development, trade, and technology.
Pakistan Engagement	Minimal involvement to maintain India-centric relations.	Renewed involvement as a component of the plan for diversification.
Indo-Pacific Positioning	Conformity to the Indo-Pacific vision and India's "Neighbourhood First" policy.	Integrated Indo-Pacific perspective with extensible alignment.
Overall Power Position	Limited independence in the context of asymmetric bilateral reliance.	Greater independence via multilateralism and diversification.

Source: Compiled by the authors

7. Challenges in Bangladesh India Relations

Following Sheikh Hasina's exit from office, the interim government, headed by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, followed a policy direction that would complicate the relationship between Dhaka and New Delhi. A deeper rapprochement with China and Pakistan suggests a strategic diversification to reduce its dependence on India, even as New Delhi is wary of Bangladesh's commitments to its Neighborhood First policy and its

standing in the region. Meanwhile, the interim government's request to have Hasina returned is adding to tensions; politically motivated, New Delhi responded to the request with a degree of avoidance in acknowledgment. Alongside this, everything has pointed to increased tensions in the relations between Bangladesh and India because of divergence strategies, regional jockeying between influences, and political sensitivities that govern the fragile relationship (Sarkar, 2025).

7.1 Challenges from Indian Perceptions

From the Indian point of view, the government expressed concerns over the safety and security of religious minorities in Bangladesh and asked for a swift return to stability. New Delhi has very important strategic concerns about the specter of extremist elements growing in the country and applications for insecurity in India given their existing porous borders (Sarkar, 2025). India has expressed its desire to pursue cordial bilateral relations and wants to further explore cooperation engagements, across sectors of bicultural interest, was reportedly activating formal and informal channels to the interim administration and military establishment.

7.1.1 Refugee Crisis from Indian Perceptions

India has a significant humanitarian and security challenge, regarding the threat of a new surge of refugees from Bangladesh, primarily from minority communities. Attacks against members of Hindu minority communities after the recent intrigues widely perceived as having links to the predecessor Awami League regime serve disturbing echoes of the problems of 1971, which saw millions of Bengali (significant numbers of whom were Hindu) refugees flee to India (Mukherjee, 2025). Should a scenario like this arise today, it would be taxing for India's humanitarian and economic capabilities and would only serve to escalate the need for new, comprehensive policy framework to prepare for refugees while keeping national security considerations in focus.

7.1.2 Security Implications for India's Northeast Region

India's northeastern states especially face security problems related to the crisis in Bangladesh. The region has an open border with Bangladesh, which enhances the potential for illegal migration and the potential for extremist elements to infiltrate India. There are also fears that a government in Bangladesh that is less friendly to India would lead to reduced security cooperation, which would benefit insurgent groups that have historically operated from across the border. India's Siliguri Corridor, or "Chicken's Neck", is also considered a significant security concern for this strategically important connection between India's Northeast and the rest of India. Changing demographics and potentially supportive networks among migrant populations add complexity to the security picture in the northeastern states as well.

7.1.3 Islamic Extremism and Anti-India Sentiment

There has been an increasing rise of anti-India sentiment among parts of the population in Bangladesh. India has expressed concern for the safety and security of Hindu minorities,

especially in the aftermath of the political transition. Reports-though unsubstantiated-suggest that some extreme elements in Bangladesh may want to incite anti-India sentiments. This situation may also increase the risk of regional instability. Concerns about the protection of a minority may complicate bilateral relations further if India feels the interim government located at Dhaka is doing too little to protect those minorities.

7.1.4 Border Security Concerns and Complexities

The political situation in Bangladesh creates substantial security and ethnic issues for India, especially with regards to border governance, extremism, and implications for the northeastern states. Since the 2024 political changes, illegal immigration has spiked due, in part, to economic crises (Ullah, 2025). India has a 4,096 km border that is very long and porous which helps facilitate not only the movement of people, but the smuggling of goods, weapons, and drugs as well, thus complicating security measures from India's perspective (Ullah, 2025). The Border Security Force (BSF) has reported a rise in infiltration and sporadic skirmishes with smugglers. Meanwhile, the interim government of Bangladesh has raised concerns over India's fencing on the border and raised the possibility of reevaluating existing agreements.

7.1.5 Extremist Incursions into India

Claims of extremist infiltration into India from Bangladesh, particularly in the borders of North Bengal's Maldah and Murshidabad districts, affirm transnational security threats are growing. Reports suggest that extremist or radical groups, particularly Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), may have been actors in violent incidents, including riots after public protests against the *Waqf* (Amendment) Act. If it is seen as alarming, it will additionally corrode trust between India and Bangladesh, recognizing, specifically, the use of India's porous western border by well-established radical networks which are organized and work in unison. Placing possible involvement of Bangladesh-based extremist networks in domestic violence in India suggests the necessity to boost intelligence sharing and enhance security cooperation. The already contentious state of Dhaka-New Delhi relations complicates matters for each country's security infrastructures to respond appropriately to these challenges.

7.1.6 Influence of Other Countries

Developments in Bangladesh-India relations are increasingly influenced by external influences, particularly China and Pakistan. The rise of China, both economically and strategically, is surmounting the image of India with the relation of Bangladesh, potentially reducing India's strategic leverage in one of its important neighboring states and leading to an increasing trajectory of Bangladesh-China relations that may have implications for regional balance. Furthermore, an increase in Bangladesh interactions with China may represent a strategic pivot by Bangladesh in order to balance against India, complicating the bilateral and overall strategic situation in the region.

7.2 Challenges from Bangladesh Perception

The public opinion in Bangladesh displays a strong support for a return to democracy and needed political reforms after Sheikh Hasina's rule, with the expectation that the interim government will initiate action by dealing with important economic problems of inflation, unemployment, and governance. The disposition toward India is mixed, with some exhibiting a negative perception regarding India's past assistance toward Hasina's repressive rule while others emphasize cooperation with India and subsequent progress. The interim government's dual policy to balance its foreign policy is consistent with the intent to exert further sovereignty in the way it engages in the international system.

7.2.1 The Chittagong Hill Tracts Conflict

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are currently witnessing a long-running ethnic conflict between the Bangladesh and the indigenous Jumma population; who have been seeking greater autonomy and protection of their cultural identity since the 1970s. A history of grievances over issues such as land rights, cultural recognition, and political representation long before independence created this situation, perpetuating an ongoing instability that continues to reverberate domestically and at the regional level. Amid this protracted instability, accusations about India's alleged support for separatists in the CHT have arisen particularly within Bangladesh. While it is not clear if India is indeed providing such support, this and similar perceptions have implications for the strategic nature of the relations, eroding trust, creating anti-India sentiments, and complicating bilateral relations. These relationships demonstrate the extent to which historical grievances, actual or perceived cross border interventions, and strategic signaling contribute to the fragile nature of Bangladesh-India relations.

7.2.2 Restrictions on Transshipment of Goods

India's decision of suspending transshipment privileges for Bangladeshi goods takes as a logistical challenge, but it can be boon for Bangladesh for permanent. Such as Coxbazar got a new international airport and Chattagram is going to get new sea port under foreign company. Besides China-Bangladesh relations is going to close (Sarkar, 2025). This has been further solidified by Yunus' comments indicating that Bangladesh can benefit from becoming a regional "maritime gateway" for India's northeastern states, thus increasing Dhaka's leverage (Sarkar, 2025). Indicators of a more assertive and somewhat cautious foreign policy stance by India has begun to emerge through its apparent willingness to take enforceable actions to defend its strategic interests and exert power when developments within a neighboring country could be seen to indirectly threaten India's position in the region (Sarkar, 2025).

7.2.3 Visa Policy Change for Bangladesh

There has been some tightening in visa policy for Bangladeshi citizens; it would undoubtedly impact the tremendous people-to-people ties that have been such a feature of this relationship. In light of the sheer number of Bangladeshi citizens that travel to India for medical care and treatment, and the pain hardship could cause, there is a chance it

could create resentment towards India. The same too with respect to business travel, as a decrease in ease of travel will reduce economic exchanges, and any arising strain of regards the broader bilateral relationship will thus exacerbate (Uddin, M. S., Tabassum, A., Hasan, K. 2025). A comparative table summarizing the challenges in Bangladesh–India relations post–July Revolution, incorporating both Indian perceptions and Bangladesh perceptions are given below:

Table-2: Challenges in Bangladesh–India relations in post–July Revolution

Challenge Domain	Indian Perceptions	Bangladesh's Perceptions	Implications for Bilateral Relations
Religious Minorities & Refugee Crisis	Hindu minority safety concerns, the possibility of a refugee crisis, reminders of the 1971 crisis, and stress related to security and humanitarian issues.	Some Bangladeshi citizens anticipate the interim administration to protect minorities because they believe India's actions have historically been biased.	Mistrust and securitisation are possible; humanitarian and refugee planning must be coordinated.
Security & Extremism	Growing anti-Indian sentiment, possible extremist group infiltration (JMB, ABT), vulnerable borders in the Northeast and <i>Siliguri</i> Corridor, and diminished bilateral security cooperation.	Awareness of Indian vigilance along borders; concerns over sovereignty and outsider invasion.	Need improved border control, intelligence sharing, and confidence-boosting initiatives.
Political Signalling & Diplomatic Friction	Dhaka's political transition seen as unstable; cautious response to requests for Hasina's return; perceived anti-India gestures	Public and interim government seek democratic reforms and sovereignty in foreign policy; mixed views on India	Cycle of perceived slights, complicating trust and bilateral coordination
Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Conflict	Concern over potential cross-border influence of insurgents; monitoring ethnic tensions	Local perception of India allegedly supporting Jumma separatists; historical grievances	Creates strategic mistrust, anti-India sentiment, and challenges in cooperation on regional security

Challenge Domain	Indian Perceptions	Bangladesh's Perceptions	Implications for Bilateral Relations
Economic & Trade Issues	Enforcement actions like suspension of transshipment privileges to protect strategic interests	Bangladesh sees opportunity to develop alternative ports (Cox's Bazar, Chattogram) and leverage China relations	Strategic recalibration of trade policy; potential friction mitigated by alternative economic pathways
Visa & People-to-People Relations	Tightening of visa regulations to protect borders and manage travel.	Dissatisfaction because of the effects on business, medical, and cultural exchanges.	May erode long-standing socioeconomic relationships; facilitation and diplomatic adjustment are needed.
Regional & External Influences	Bangladesh's growing ties to China are perceived as a strategic shift; India's influence is diminishing.	Engagement with China and Pakistan is seen by the interim government as diversification to demonstrate autonomy.	External balance makes regional strategy more complex and complicates bilateral strategy.

Source: Compiled by authors

8. Conclusion and Future Implications

Bangladesh and India have a complex and varied relationship informed by historical, political, economic, and strategic conditions. Although there are substantial linkages that follow from geographic proximity, a shared historical past and economic interdependence, relations have been episodic throughout the post-independence period, particularly following Bangladesh's own July revolution. India's historical backing of Bangladesh's struggle for freedom and its strategic hill in the region as a big neighbor accentuate India's key role in Bangladesh's socio-economic and political development. However, a number of persistent issues contribute to structural disadvantages to Bangladesh's autonomy and obstruct constructive acts of cooperation in the region, such as border management, water sharing arrangements and the problems of migration and trade imbalance, and issues with political meddling. Effectively addressing the two countries' bilateral issues is an essential prerequisite not only to stability in Bangladesh-India relations, but also to peace, development, and security throughout South Asia.

Even as Bangladesh faces a period of political instability, India should try to leverage its economic and strategic advantages towards securing a long-term stable region. Although instability affects economic opportunity in the short-run, a stable, prosperous Bangladesh creates many opportunities for India. In addition to fostering bilateral economic integration through the diversification of trade and investment focus in sectors of importance and pursuit of intra-regional infrastructure initiatives to improve connectivity, India will also be creating more prosperity for Bangladesh.

On the matter of security, India and Bangladesh face shared challenges such as terrorism and cross-border crime. While uncertainty and strategic risk may happen because of the political situation in Bangladesh, collaboration and cooperation on security issues of mutual interest has likely proceed on topics of importance to the security of the State. India must strive to build trust and create an effective working relationship with the new Bangladesh government, in order to create and develop future discussion and cooperation on counter-terrorism, border management and regional security matters.

In addition, India has a chance to bolster its reputation as a regional and responsible power in South Asia through a responsible and constructive response to changing political conditions in Bangladesh. By respecting the sovereignty of Bangladesh and the due processes of its internal political situation, while being clear about India's legitimate concerns and addressing them, India can further build its standing as a responsible and reliable regional actor with concerns for peace and cooperation in South Asia.

By taking these approaches may Bangladesh and India be able to transition their connection into a constructive, equitable, and mutually beneficial partnership for each other as well as potentially beneficial not only for their development but also for peace and prosperity across the region of South Asia.

Role of Authors

Ahamad Ali: writing-reviewing original draft & editing, methodology, **Hasibur Rahaman:** editing and reviewing, and conceptualization.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no actual or potential conflict of financial interests or personal relationships that could be construed to influence their work reported in this paper, and no funding has been received for this research.

Declaration of AI Involvement

To enhance language clarity, synthesize theme findings, ensure methodological integrity, enhance ethical compliance, and enhance analytical accuracy, we engaged OpenAI's ChatGPT wholly for academic and research purposes in the preparation of this work. We then carefully checked and revised all text after using the AI-assisted method to ensure correctness, consistency, and uniqueness of the text. We acknowledge that this publication is entirely the authors' responsibility.

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