



Contemporary Relations between India and Bangladesh

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Abstract:

The present-day relationship between India and Bangladesh stands as one of the most important bilateral partnerships in South Asia. It is shaped by a shared historical experience, deep cultural connections, close geographic proximity, and increasing economic interdependence. India's support during Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971 laid the foundation for a relationship that has steadily expanded into multiple areas, including trade, transport connectivity, energy cooperation, security coordination, and people-to-people engagement. In recent years, however, this partnership has faced fresh challenges. Political changes within Bangladesh, unresolved river-water sharing issues, trade imbalances, concerns over border management and migration, and changing public perceptions have complicated bilateral interactions. At the same time, the growing involvement of external actors—especially China—has added a strategic dimension to India–Bangladesh relations. Despite these pressures, both countries continue to recognize the long-term value of cooperation, driven by shared economic interests and regional security concerns. This study explores the evolving nature of India–Bangladesh relations by examining areas of collaboration, emerging tensions, and future possibilities, emphasizing the importance of sustained dialogue, mutual trust, and practical policy coordination in an increasingly complex regional environment.

Keywords: India and Bangladesh, Regional cooperation and connectivity, Border Management and security.

Introduction

India and Bangladesh share one of the most significant neighbourly relationships in South Asia. Their ties are rooted in common cultural traditions, shared

geography, historical experiences, and economic links that have developed over decades. India's decisive role in Bangladesh's independence in 1971

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created a strong basis for cooperation and goodwill. Over time, this relationship matured into a close partnership covering political, economic, and security dimensions.

However, recent political shifts, economic disagreements, and changing regional power dynamics have introduced new layers of complexity. These developments have challenged the long-standing perception of India–Bangladesh relations as an uninterrupted success story. This article seeks to assess the contemporary state of bilateral relations by analyzing cooperation, sources of strain, geopolitical influences, domestic political factors, and the prospects for future engagement.

Historical context

The shared memory of the 1971 Liberation War lies at the heart of India–Bangladesh relations. India’s political, diplomatic, and military support was instrumental in Bangladesh’s emergence as an independent nation. This experience fostered enduring diplomatic ties and strong people-to-people connections. In 1972, the two countries formalized their relationship through the Indo-Bangla Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace, which symbolized their commitment to mutual respect and collaboration.

Over the years, bilateral cooperation has expanded across several sectors, including border management, trade and commerce, water sharing, transport

connectivity, and cultural exchange, reflecting the broad-based nature of the relationship.

Areas of Cooperation

Economic and Trade Relations

India and Bangladesh have emerged as major trading partners within South Asia. Bilateral trade has grown steadily, with India exporting textiles, machinery, fuel, food products, and consumer goods, while Bangladesh supplies ready-made garments, agricultural produce, and other manufactured items.

Important joint initiatives include the **Bangladesh–India Friendship Pipeline**, which links Siliguri in India with Parbatipur in Bangladesh and strengthens regional energy security. Additionally, land ports and inland waterways have played a key role in facilitating trade and movement, although recent tensions have affected trade flows.

Connectivity and Infrastructure Development

Improving cross-border connectivity has remained a central priority. New rail links, bridges, and inland water transport routes have enhanced access between India’s northeastern states and Bangladesh, supporting trade, tourism, and regional integration.

Security and Border Cooperation

The India–Bangladesh border, stretching over 4,000 kilometres, requires close coordination to address security concerns. Regular meetings between

border forces, cooperation on crime prevention, and mechanisms to manage migration form part of ongoing security dialogue, even as challenges persist.

Cultural and people to people contacts

Shared language, literature, festivals, music, and historical traditions continue to bind the two societies together. Bengali culture spans both sides of the border, reinforcing social and emotional connections. Efforts to strengthen cultural exchanges remain an important aspect of bilateral engagement.

Current Challenges

Despite a strong foundation, recent developments have strained bilateral relations and disrupted the earlier momentum of cooperation.

Diplomatic Strain

Bangladesh experienced significant political change during 2024–25 following the end of the long tenure of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the formation of an interim administration under Muhammad Yunus. This transition coincided with a period of uncertainty in relations with India, marked by cautious diplomatic engagement.

Incidents such as the temporary suspension of visa services at Bangladeshi missions in India reflected heightened sensitivities. Nevertheless, continued diplomatic contacts, including meetings between Indian officials and Bangladeshi political leaders, indicate a shared interest in keeping communication channels open.

Trade and Economic disputes

Economic disagreements have emerged alongside expanding trade. India's restrictions on certain Bangladeshi exports and Bangladesh's limits on Indian imports—such as rice and yarn—have created friction. These measures highlight concerns over non-tariff barriers and protectionism, raising questions about the long-term stability of economic cooperation.

Border Incidents and Security concerns

Border-related incidents, including attacks on diplomatic facilities and localized unrest, have occasionally affected bilateral perceptions. Such events demonstrate how internal political developments and extremist actions can influence security cooperation and public opinion.

Public discourse plays a powerful role in shaping bilateral relations. In Bangladesh, some political narratives portray India as overly influential, while in India, debates over migration and border security generate caution and mistrust. These perceptions can complicate diplomatic efforts and slow confidence-building initiatives.

Bangladesh Hobnobs with other powers

Bangladesh's growing engagement with China represents a key strategic factor. Chinese investments in infrastructure and trade have expanded Dhaka's economic options but have also raised concerns in India amid broader regional competition. While Bangladesh

seeks to balance its foreign relations, its partnership with China influences India's strategic calculations.

External Actors

Bangladesh's interactions with Pakistan and countries such as Russia also shape regional dynamics. International appeals for stability in India–Bangladesh relations underline the broader regional interest in maintaining peace and cooperation.

Future prospects

- Despite current challenges, several factors suggest resilience in India–Bangladesh relations:
- Deep historical and cultural ties continue to anchor the relationship.
- Economic interdependence creates incentives for restoring cooperation.
- Diplomatic mechanisms provide platforms to resolve disputes.
- Regional organizations such as BIMSTEC and SAARC offer avenues for broader cooperation.
- Future progress will depend on political leadership, mutual trust, and practical policy solutions that balance domestic pressures with regional realities.

Conclusion

India–Bangladesh relations are presently at a critical crossroads. While the partnership remains grounded in shared history and extensive cooperation, it faces pressure from political changes, economic disagreements, border

challenges, shifting public narratives, and external strategic influences.

Although tensions have been visible in recent years, the fundamental basis for cooperation remains strong. Renewed dialogue, economic engagement, and careful management of regional dynamics will be essential to ensuring that the relationship moves toward stability and constructive partnership in the years ahead.

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