



India-Bangladesh Relations in the Post-Hasina Era: Analytical Study

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Abstract:

The political transition in Bangladesh following the tenure of Sheikh Hasina marks a significant turning point in India–Bangladesh relations, which have historically been characterized by cooperation, strategic convergence, and occasional tensions. This article examines the evolving dynamics of bilateral relations in the post-Hasina era, focusing on key areas such as political engagement, economic cooperation, security collaboration, and regional geopolitics. During Hasina’s leadership, ties between the two countries strengthened through enhanced connectivity, trade expansion, counter-terrorism efforts, and the resolution of long-standing disputes such as the Land Boundary Agreement. However, the emergence of a new political leadership in Bangladesh introduces uncertainties as well as opportunities for recalibrating foreign policy priorities.

The study analyses potential shifts in Bangladesh’s domestic political landscape and their implications for India’s neighbourhood policy, particularly under the “Act East” framework. It also explores challenges including border management, migration concerns, water-sharing disputes (notably the Teesta River issue), and the growing influence of external factors such as China in the region. At the same time, prospects for deepening cooperation in energy, infrastructure, digital connectivity, and regional integration through platforms like BIMSTEC are assessed. By adopting a multidimensional approach, the article argues that while the post-Hasina phase may introduce complexities, the structural interdependence and shared historical ties between India and Bangladesh provide a strong foundation for sustained engagement. The future trajectory will depend on diplomatic adaptability, mutual trust, and strategic balancing in a changing regional order.

Keywords: *India-Bangladesh Relations, Post-Hasina Era, Regional Geopolitics, Bilateral Cooperation, South Asia Politics.*

Introduction:

The relationship between India and Bangladesh has been historically rooted in shared cultural heritage, geographical proximity, and the legacy of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. Since the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state in 1971, bilateral ties have undergone significant transformations, oscillating between phases of cooperation and occasional tension. These shifts have largely been influenced by domestic political developments, leadership changes, and broader regional dynamics within South Asia.

Despite such fluctuations, the relationship has remained strategically important for both nations, encompassing areas such as trade, connectivity, security, and people-to-people interactions.

In recent decades, under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, India-Bangladesh relations entered a phase of remarkable stability and constructive engagement. This period was characterized by enhanced bilateral cooperation in diverse sectors, including infrastructure development, cross-border connectivity, energy sharing, and counter-terrorism efforts. One of the most notable achievements of this era was the successful implementation of the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement, which resolved a decades-old territorial dispute and demonstrated a strong commitment to peaceful conflict resolution. Hasina's government consistently maintained a pragmatic and pro-India foreign policy orientation, prioritizing regional stability, economic development, and mutual trust.

However, the transition to a post-Hasina era introduces a new and complex phase in bilateral relations, marked by both uncertainty and potential recalibration. Political change in Bangladesh may significantly influence its foreign policy priorities, domestic political alignments, and engagement with regional and global actors. This raises critical questions regarding the continuity of existing agreements, the sustainability of security cooperation, and the management of unresolved issues such as water-sharing disputes and border governance. Furthermore, the increasing involvement of external powers, particularly China, adds a new dimension to the strategic landscape, potentially affecting the balance of power and regional geopolitics.

In this evolving context, it becomes imperative to critically assess the trajectory of India-Bangladesh relations beyond the Hasina period. The post-Hasina era will test the resilience of institutional mechanisms and diplomatic goodwill developed over the years, while also presenting opportunities for policy innovation and strategic realignment. This article seeks to examine the key challenges, emerging opportunities, and broader geopolitical implications of bilateral relations in this transitional phase, with a focus on continuity, change, and the future direction of engagement between the two neighbouring countries.

Achievements of the Hasina Era:

The tenure of Sheikh Hasina marks a transformative phase in India-Bangladesh relations, characterized by unprecedented cooperation, mutual trust, and strategic alignment. Her government played a pivotal role in redefining bilateral ties with India, shifting the relationship from one of periodic engagement to a sustained partnership rooted in shared economic, political, and security interests. One of the most significant achievements of the Hasina era was the successful implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015. This historic accord resolved decades-old border disputes involving enclaves and adverse possessions, thereby ending one of the most complex territorial issues in South Asia. The agreement not only facilitated the exchange of enclaves but also improved the lives of thousands of stateless people by granting them citizenship and access to basic rights. It stands as a landmark example of peaceful dispute resolution through diplomatic dialogue.

Economic cooperation between the two countries also witnessed remarkable progress. Under Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh emerged as one of India's most important trading partners in the region. Bilateral trade expanded significantly, supported by improved connectivity, reduced trade barriers, and enhanced infrastructural links such as road, rail, and inland waterways. India extended lines of credit to Bangladesh for infrastructure development, including power generation and transportation networks, further deepening economic interdependence. Additionally, energy cooperation particularly in electricity trade strengthened the foundation of a long-term strategic partnership.

Another crucial dimension of the Hasina era was the strengthening of counter-terrorism and security cooperation. The Bangladeshi government adopted a firm stance against extremist groups and actively collaborated with Indian security agencies to curb cross-border terrorism and insurgency. By dismantling

anti-India militant networks operating from its territory, Bangladesh significantly contributed to regional stability and security. This proactive approach not only enhanced mutual trust but also positioned Bangladesh as a responsible regional actor committed to combating terrorism.

Furthermore, Hasina's government emphasized regional connectivity and subregional cooperation initiatives, including frameworks like BIMSTEC and BBIN, which facilitated closer integration between South and Southeast Asia. Her pragmatic and forward-looking foreign policy helped transform Bangladesh into a key strategic partner for India. In sum, the Hasina era represents a high point in India-Bangladesh relations, marked by diplomatic breakthroughs, economic integration, and robust security collaboration. These achievements have laid a strong foundation for future engagement, even as the post-Hasina era presents new challenges and opportunities for both nations.

Challenges That Persist:

Despite significant progress in bilateral relations, several enduring challenges continue to shape the trajectory of India-Bangladesh ties in the post-Sheikh Hasina era. One of the most persistent issues is the unresolved water-sharing dispute over the Teesta River. The absence of a comprehensive agreement has created dissatisfaction in Bangladesh, where the river is crucial for agriculture and livelihoods. The delay in finalizing the Teesta accord reflects not only bilateral complexities but also internal political constraints within India, particularly at the state level.

Border management remains another sensitive concern. Although both countries have made notable efforts to enhance cooperation and reduce illegal activities along the border, sporadic incidents involving border forces continue to generate tensions. Civilian casualties, allegations of human rights violations, and issues related to smuggling and unauthorized crossings periodically strain diplomatic goodwill and public perception on both sides.

The Rohingya refugee crisis presents an additional layer of complexity. Bangladesh bears the overwhelming burden of hosting millions of refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar, while India has adopted a more cautious and security-oriented stance. Diverging policy approaches toward Myanmar and refugee management have occasionally limited the scope of coordinated regional responses, posing challenges for long-term stability and humanitarian resolution.

Economic relations, though expanding, are not without friction. Bangladesh has increasingly voiced concerns regarding trade imbalances, with perceptions that the benefits of bilateral trade disproportionately favor India. Issues such as non-tariff barriers, market access limitations, and infrastructural constraints hinder the realization of a more equitable trade partnership.

Addressing these persistent challenges requires sustained political will, mutual trust, and institutional mechanisms that can balance national interests with regional cooperation. Without meaningful progress in these areas, the long-term potential of India-Bangladesh relations may remain constrained.

Transition to the post-Hasina Era:

The potential transition to a post-Sheikh Hasina era marks a critical juncture in the political trajectory of Bangladesh, with significant implications for regional geopolitics. As one of the most influential and long-serving leaders in the country's history, Hasina's leadership has ensured political continuity, economic growth, and strong bilateral ties with India. However, growing speculation about succession raises questions regarding the future direction of governance, political stability, and ideological orientation in Bangladesh. The absence of a clearly defined successor within the ruling Awami League, coupled with the resurgence of opposition forces, introduces uncertainty into the country's political landscape.

For India, such a transition necessitates a recalibration of its foreign policy priorities in South Asia. Under Hasina's leadership, India-Bangladesh relations have reached unprecedented levels of cooperation, particularly in areas such as security, connectivity, and economic integration. A change in leadership in Dhaka may alter these dynamics, especially if a new government adopts a more nationalist or China-leaning foreign policy stance. Consequently, India must prepare to engage with a broader spectrum of political actors in Bangladesh, ensuring that bilateral relations remain resilient regardless of domestic political changes.

Moreover, the possibility of a shift in bilateral dynamics cannot be overlooked. A new leadership may revisit existing agreements, renegotiate terms of cooperation, or redefine strategic priorities, potentially impacting issues such as border management, water sharing, and regional connectivity. At the same time, the institutional depth of India-Bangladesh relations provides a strong foundation for continuity. Ultimately, the post-Hasina era will test the adaptability of both nations in sustaining a mutually beneficial partnership amid evolving political realities.

Opportunities for Strengthening Relations:

The evolving dynamics of India-Bangladesh relations in the post-Sheikh Hasina era present significant opportunities for deepening bilateral cooperation across multiple domains. One of the foremost areas is economic integration, where the proposed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) can play a transformative role. By reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, harmonizing standards, and facilitating investment flows, CEPA can elevate trade relations beyond their current scope. Bangladesh's growing manufacturing sector and India's vast market create a complementary framework that can boost exports, strengthen supply chains, and promote regional value integration, especially in textiles, pharmaceuticals, and digital services.

Another key opportunity lies in strategic connectivity, which is central to both regional development and the broader Indo-Pacific framework. Expanding multimodal connectivity through road, rail, inland waterways, and coastal shipping can enhance economic interdependence and regional stability. Initiatives such as the revival of pre-partition rail links, development of border hats, and integration of ports like Chattogram and Mongla with India's northeastern states can significantly reduce logistical costs and improve access to markets. Enhanced connectivity not only benefits bilateral trade but also positions both countries as critical players in subregional groupings like BIMSTEC, thereby reinforcing their strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific.

Cultural and educational exchanges also offer a vital avenue for strengthening ties. Shared historical experiences, linguistic affinities, and cultural heritage form a strong foundation for people-to-people engagement. Expanding academic collaborations, student exchange programs, and joint research initiatives between Indian and Bangladeshi institutions can foster mutual understanding and long-term cooperation. Additionally, promoting cultural diplomacy through literature, film, and tourism can enhance soft power and reinforce a shared regional identity. Such initiatives are essential for building trust and sustaining bilateral relations beyond political transitions.

Finally, water resources management remains both a challenge and an opportunity. The resolution of pending disputes, particularly concerning transboundary rivers like the Teesta, requires sustained political will and scientific cooperation. Developing sustainable and equitable water-sharing mechanisms, supported by data-sharing and joint river basin management, can mitigate conflicts and promote environmental sustainability. Collaborative efforts in flood control, climate change adaptation, and river conservation can further strengthen bilateral trust and resilience. In sum, by focusing on economic integration, connectivity, cultural engagement, and water cooperation, India and Bangladesh can not only navigate the uncertainties of the post-Hasina period but also build a more robust, mutually beneficial partnership for the future.

Geopolitical Considerations:

In the post-Hasina era, geopolitical dynamics are expected to play a decisive role in shaping India-Bangladesh relations, particularly in the context of intensifying great-power competition in South Asia. One of the most significant concerns for India is balancing the growing influence of China in Bangladesh. Over the past decade, Beijing has expanded its footprint through large-scale infrastructure investments under the Belt and Road Initiative, including ports, bridges, and energy projects. These investments have strengthened Bangladesh's economic capacity but have also increased its strategic dependence on China. In a post-Hasina political landscape, where policy continuity may be uncertain, India faces the challenge of ensuring that Dhaka does not drift excessively into China's strategic orbit. Consequently, New Delhi may prioritize economic diplomacy, connectivity projects, and development partnerships to maintain its influence and reinforce mutual interdependence.

The evolving Indo-Pacific strategic framework further shapes the geopolitical context of bilateral ties. India's engagement with groupings like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue comprising the United States, Japan, and Australia reflects its broader objective of promoting a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Although Bangladesh is not a formal member of the Quad, its geographic location and growing economic significance make it a crucial partner in this emerging regional order. India may seek to align its Bangladesh policy with Indo-Pacific priorities, including maritime security, supply chain resilience, and sustainable development. However, Bangladesh has traditionally pursued a policy of strategic neutrality and "friendship to all," which may lead it to cautiously engage with Indo-Pacific initiatives without overtly antagonizing China. This delicate balancing act underscores the need for India to adopt a nuanced and non-coercive approach in its diplomatic engagement.

Furthermore, Bangladesh's role in regional organizations such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation adds another dimension to its geopolitical importance. As SAARC remains largely inactive due to India-Pakistan tensions, BIMSTEC has emerged as a viable platform for fostering regional cooperation, particularly in connectivity, trade, and security across the Bay of Bengal region. Bangladesh's active participation and leadership in BIMSTEC enhance its strategic value for India's "Neighbourhood First" and "Act East" policies. Strengthening collaboration within these forums can help both countries advance shared regional goals while mitigating external influences. In sum, the post-Hasina phase will require India to carefully navigate geopolitical challenges by balancing China's presence, leveraging Indo-Pacific frameworks, and deepening regional cooperation with Bangladesh to sustain a stable and mutually beneficial partnership.

The Way Forward of the India-Bangladesh Relation:

The future of relations between India and Bangladesh in the post-Sheikh Hasina era will depend on both continuity and adaptability. Sustaining the goodwill generated during Hasina's tenure is essential, as it laid a strong foundation of trust, cooperation, and mutual respect. However, changing political leadership in Bangladesh may bring new priorities and perspectives. India must therefore adopt a pragmatic and flexible diplomatic approach that respects Bangladesh's domestic political dynamics while reinforcing long-term bilateral commitments. Strengthening people-to-people ties, cultural exchanges, and institutional mechanisms will help preserve this goodwill beyond individual leadership.

At the same time, both countries must ensure that their partnership remains mutually beneficial, particularly in trade, security, and regional cooperation. Addressing persistent issues such as trade imbalances, border management, and water sharing through dialogue and equitable frameworks will be crucial. Enhanced cooperation in counter-terrorism, border security, and tackling transnational challenges like human

trafficking and smuggling should remain a priority. Expanding trade diversification, improving connectivity infrastructure, and encouraging investment can create a more balanced and resilient economic partnership.

Furthermore, Bangladesh's strategic geographic location offers immense opportunities for regional connectivity and global economic integration. By leveraging this advantage, India and Bangladesh can strengthen subregional initiatives such as BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) and BIMSTEC, facilitating smoother transit, energy cooperation, and supply chain integration. Improved connectivity through road, rail, and maritime networks can transform the region into a dynamic economic corridor linking South Asia with Southeast Asia. In this context, fostering collaboration in emerging sectors like digital economy, renewable energy, and blue economy will open new avenues for growth.

Conclusion:

The trajectory of India-Bangladesh relations in the post-Hasina era will depend significantly on the ability of both countries to sustain consistent and constructive diplomatic engagement. The tenure of Sheikh Hasina marked a period of notable stability, cooperation, and mutual trust, creating a strong foundation for bilateral ties. However, political transitions often introduce uncertainties, making it imperative for both India and Bangladesh to institutionalize dialogue mechanisms that transcend leadership changes. Regular high-level interactions, robust people-to-people exchanges, and proactive conflict-resolution strategies will be essential to navigate emerging challenges and sustain the momentum of cooperation.

A stable and cooperative relationship between the two nations offers substantial mutual benefits that extend beyond bilateral interests. Economically, enhanced trade connectivity, cross-border infrastructure development, and regional integration initiatives can significantly boost growth and development on both sides. Strategically, collaboration in areas such as border management, counter-terrorism, and maritime security contributes to peace and stability in South Asia. Moreover, cooperation in water sharing, climate change mitigation, and disaster management is crucial given the shared ecological vulnerabilities of the region. Thus, the continuation of a pragmatic and forward-looking partnership is not merely desirable but necessary for ensuring long-term regional stability and prosperity.

Equally important is the recognition of deep-rooted historical and cultural ties that bind the people of the two nations. The shared legacy of the Bangladesh Liberation War, linguistic and cultural affinities, and enduring social connections provide a unique foundation for strengthening future partnerships. These bonds foster mutual understanding and goodwill, which can act as stabilizing forces even during periods of political uncertainty. By nurturing these connections through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and civil society engagement, both countries can reinforce trust and solidarity at the grassroots level.

In conclusion, the post-Hasina phase represents both a challenge and an opportunity for India-Bangladesh relations. By prioritizing sustained diplomatic engagement, recognizing the shared benefits of cooperation, and building upon their historical and cultural linkages, India and Bangladesh can continue to forge a resilient and mutually beneficial partnership. Such an approach will not only safeguard bilateral interests but also contribute meaningfully to the broader vision of regional peace, connectivity, and development in South Asia.

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