

2. Future of India-Bangladesh Relationship- International Relation

According to a recent report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, India is facing its most formidable strategic challenge in Bangladesh since the 1971 Liberation War

Strategic Context- Post-2024 Regime Change in Bangladesh

Strategic Disruption Since 1971- India is facing its most serious strategic setback in Bangladesh since the 1971 Liberation War, marking a sharp reversal from a decade of close cooperation. The ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2024 dismantled a pro-India political ecosystem that had enabled deep defence, intelligence, and connectivity cooperation. The death sentence awarded to Hasina in November 2025 by Bangladesh's interim authorities, on charges of inciting unrest, has-

1. Internationalised Bangladesh's internal political crisis
2. Constrained India's diplomatic manoeuvrability
3. Hardened nationalist and anti-India narratives in Bangladeshi politics

Political Reordering in Dhaka- The interim government has banned all political activity of the Awami League, eliminating India's principal political interlocutor. The National Citizen Party (NCP), led by student activists, has emerged as a dominant force

1. Ideologically less committed to historical India-Bangladesh ties
2. More open to Chinese, Turkish, and Pakistani engagement

The February 2026 elections, from which Awami League is barred, are likely to institutionalise a post-Hasina political order less aligned with Indian strategic interests.

Expanding Role of External Powers

China and Turkey- Strategic Penetration- The report flags growing Chinese and Turkish influence in

1. Infrastructure financing
2. Defence procurement
3. Port development and dual-use facilities

China's approach aligns with its Maritime Silk Road and BRI objectives, potentially undermining India's strategic depth in the Bay of Bengal. Turkey's defence diplomacy and ideological outreach represent a new vector of influence, complicating South Asian geopolitics.

Implications for India- Erosion of India's traditional security primacy in Bangladesh. Risk of strategic encirclement when viewed alongside Chinese presence in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. Weakening of India's influence in BIMSTEC and Bay of Bengal security architecture

Shrinking Strategic Space and Diplomatic Chill

Rise of Anti-India Sentiment- The new regime has adopted a nationalistic, sovereignty-first foreign policy posture, reducing policy convergence with India. Public protests against India, including demonstrations at the Indian High Commission in Dhaka (December 2025), indicate

1. Politicisation of India-Bangladesh relations
2. Instrumental use of anti-India rhetoric for domestic legitimacy

Diplomatic Consequences- Cooling of high-level political exchanges, Slowing of joint project implementation, Reduced trust on security and intelligence cooperation

Connectivity and Economic Cooperation Under Stress

Strategic Connectivity Pillars at Risk- India has consistently viewed connectivity as the backbone of the bilateral relationship, especially for integrating the North-East. Flagship projects now face uncertainty due to political instability.

Key Projects and Initiatives- India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (2023). Strategic energy infrastructure for diesel supply to Bangladesh. Symbol of economic interdependence. Cross-border rail and road connectivity Reopening of six pre-1965 rail links, Passenger trains- Maitri, Bandhan, and Mitali Express. Inland waterways and port access Use of Chittagong Port and Mongla Port for Indian transit (since 2023)

BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA)- Critical for logistics efficiency in North-East India. Enhances sub-regional economic integration. Political instability now threatens the continuity and expansion of

these initiatives.

Security and Regional Stability Dimensions

Border and Internal Security- India and Bangladesh share a 4,096-km porous border, making cooperation indispensable for

1. Counterterrorism
2. Preventing illegal migration
3. Combating narcotics, arms trafficking, and fake currency

Regular DG-level talks between border and anti-narcotics agencies have been a stabilising mechanism.

Defence Cooperation- Long-standing military-to-military engagement Joint exercises such as Sampriti and Bongo Sagar. Continued support for Muktijoddha (freedom fighters) through medical schemes, Scholarships extended till 2027. Any dilution of defence ties could directly impact India's internal security, particularly in the North-East.

Ganga Water Treaty- An Emerging Strategic Test

Treaty Renewal Challenge- The Ganga Water Treaty, signed in 1996, expires in December 2026. Despite its strategic importance

1. No formal bilateral negotiations have begun
2. India has initiated internal consultations with state governments

Strategic Risks- Absence of timely engagement could

1. Create a post-2026 legal and diplomatic vacuum
2. Trigger water-sharing disputes with regional destabilisation effects

The committee strongly recommends early and sustained bilateral dialogue to

1. Depoliticise water cooperation
2. Preserve long-term hydrological and ecological stability

Economic, Energy, and Development Partnership

Trade and Investment- Bangladesh is India's largest trade partner in South Asia. FY 2023-24 bilateral trade

1. USD 14.01 billion total
2. Bangladesh exports to India- USD 1.97 billion

Trade imbalance persists but is cushioned by development cooperation and market access.

Power and Energy Cooperation- Bangladesh imports 1,160 MW of electricity from India. Institutional mechanisms Joint Working Group and Steering Committee on Power

Key projects- Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant, Energy collaboration involving

1. ONGC Videsh Ltd
2. Oil India
3. Indian Oil Corporation

Development Partnership- Bangladesh is India's largest development partner with

1. USD 8 billion Lines of Credit
2. Roads, railways, ports, and shipping projects

77 completed and 16 ongoing High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs). Human capital cooperation

1. ITEC programmes
2. 1,000 Suborno Jayanti Scholarships
3. Dedicated education portal for Bangladeshi students

Strategic Significance for India's Regional Vision

Bangladesh is central to- Neighbourhood First Policy. Act East Policy. India's Indo-Pacific strategy. A stable, cooperative Bangladesh is essential for North-East economic integration. Bay of Bengal security. Countering extra-regional powers

Conclusion- Way Forward

India must recalibrate its Bangladesh policy from personality-centric engagement to institution-centric diplomacy. Priorities should include

1. Early engagement with the interim and future elected government
2. Safeguarding connectivity and energy projects
3. Preventing external strategic capture
4. Proactive diplomacy on the Ganga Water Treaty

Sustaining people-to-people, economic, and developmental ties remains India's strongest strategic insurance against political volatility in Dhaka.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-faces-its-greatest-strategic-challenge-in-bangladesh-since-1971-parliamentary-committee-on-external-affairs/article70412853.ece>

