



## **A Study on China-Bangladesh Relations in the Context of the Geopolitical, Security, Strategic and Economic Interests of India**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The geopolitical dynamics of South Asia have changed significantly in the twenty-first century, with Bangladesh emerging as a vital participant in China's regional cooperation and development. This article investigates the emerging economic and strategic partnership between China and Bangladesh, examining its security, economic and strategic implications for India, particularly in light of Bangladesh's recent political shift. As China has decided to strengthen commercial and defense ties with Bangladesh, India's traditional regional influence faces an increasing threat in recent time. The study investigates how Bangladesh's growing reliance on Chinese investments and military backing, threaten India's security, trade and impact regional stability. By studying the China- Bangladesh geopolitical and economic relations this article aims to provide a thorough understanding of India's security, economic, regional and strategic goals in both South and Southeast Asia. This study has found that a strong relationship between China and Bangladesh might jeopardize India's regional interests in South and Southeast Asia. But, a strong and cordial relationship among China-Bangladesh and India, is of course, in favor of India's Interests. The study is based on secondary data, focus group discussions and observation methods. Finally, the study has provided with some policy recommendations so as to improve the relationship among China, India and Bangladesh. After all, regional development, economic cooperation and cultural ties in the whole region are very essential.

**Keywords:** China, Bangladesh, India, Strategic Alliance, South Asian Geopolitics, India's Regional Influence, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Economic Cooperation.

## INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical environment of South Asia has changed dramatically in the 21st century, with China's growing influence in terms of the economic growth and development in both South, Southeast and Northeast Asia. China's growing economic and political influence has led to a geostrategic and economic focus on South Asia, including the Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI, which is making Bangladesh a major partner. As China's global economic and political power rises, its strategic focus on South Asia, particularly through initiatives such as the BRI has positioned Bangladesh as an important partner. The China-Bangladesh relationship, which began in the 1970s, has progressed from a cooperative partnership to a growing strategic alliance, with significant Chinese investments in Bangladesh's infrastructure, energy, education, cultural, and defense sectors. Bangladesh's political environment has shifted significantly under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, with a focus on economic growth and infrastructural development. These domestic, strategic and economic interests of Bangladesh have an implication for China's regional development goals and geopolitical interest in the whole region. It's true that the China's growing involvement in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries is, of course, playing a pivotal role in socio-economic and infrastructural development in South Asia. India, being a largest country in the South Asia, has always put pressure on its small neighboring countries to influence their domestic and foreign policies. But, following recent political change in Bangladesh, the country has started to reinvigorate its geopolitical, strategic, security and economic relations with China based on which India has castigated the recent foreign policy of Bangladesh. The growing China-Bangladesh collaboration creates new problems for India's geopolitical interests, particularly in terms of economic competition, security cooperation, and regional stability. This study investigates the emerging strategic alliance between China and Bangladesh in the twenty-first century, with a particular emphasis on the political upheavals within Bangladesh that have hastened the development of this relationship. The study analyzes the broader implications for India's regional influence and security concerns by examining the alliance's economic, political, and security elements. By offering a complete picture of how these trends are transforming South Asia's power balance, the study emphasizes the geostrategic, geopolitical and security issues that India may need to consider and implement in the context of relationship between China and Bangladesh. However, Pakistan is also an important partner of both South Asia and China; thus, China-Pakistan and Bangladesh alliance might be a big challenge and security concern for India's regional interest and hegemonic influence. Therefore, all stakeholders of both South Asia and China have to realize the political and economic circumstance of South Asia; and must formulate the foreign policy based on mutual interests and non-interference in any country's domestic and foreign policy.

### Concept of Strategic Alliance in International Relations

A strategic alliance in the context of bilateral relations is a formal agreement between two governments to collaborate on specific topics while keeping their own processes for decision-making (Smith, 2020). Such alliances are frequently formed to strengthen political, economic, military, or cultural relations, allowing partner countries to harness their distinctive strengths and resources to mutual advantage (Zhang, J., & Islam, R. 2020).

### China- Bangladesh Relations and Strategic Alliance

In the twenty-first century, China and Bangladesh's strategic partnership has grown dramatically as geopolitical, economic, and security objectives are mutually shared and

exchanged. Bangladesh sees China as an important partner in its economic growth, modernization, and infrastructural development, particularly in the context of the BRI Initiative (Rajaratnam, S., & Paul, T. V. 2019). Bangladesh gives an easy access to the Bay of Bengal, bolstering China's position in the Indian Ocean and Arab sea. It should be mentioned here that the Bay of Bengal is very important for both China and India for geostrategic, geopolitical, security and economic interests. China, being a largest trading nation of the world, has completely relied on the Melaka strait for shipments and other maritime transportations. But, due to regional and global geopolitics in South China sea and its surrounding areas, the route has become dangerous for China; and, if future the Chinese authority might face big obstacle and different challenges. Thus, the Bay of Bengal can be an alternative trade route for China to serve its economic and geopolitical interest. So, in that case, China needs Bangladesh so as to build an economic corridor through the state of Myanmar by which it can have an easy access to the Bay of Bengal via the Southeast coastal zone of Bangladesh, Ukhia and Teknaf. Bangladesh is an small country with lower GDP that requires foreign direct investment, transfer of technology, economic connectivity, infrastructural development and industrial growth belt where China may come ahead to help grow the economy of Bangladesh by trade and investment and economic corridor. Therefore, the relationship between China and Bangladesh is very essential for both development partners.

### **Cooperation in the Field of Defense and Armed Forces between China and Bangladesh**

China has emerged as a significant development partner and actor in ensuring Bangladesh's security, primarily through the supply of military equipment and training for the Bangladeshi armed forces (Kapila, 2003). Over the years, this strategic partnership has deepened, with notable examples such as the shipment of surveillance equipment in 2006 and the sale of fighter planes during the same year (People's Daily, 2006). China's influence in Bangladesh's defense landscape is underscored by the substantial volume of arms purchases from China, with Chinese weapons accounting for a significant portion of Bangladesh's military arsenal (Wiseman, Karimova, and Wiseman, 2020). The low cost of Chinese armament, along with the availability of soft loans, has made China an appealing partner for Bangladesh's infrastructural development and transfer of technology.

In addition to military cooperation, China's involvement in Bangladesh extends to law enforcement. A mutual aid treaty was signed between the two countries in 2018, facilitating collaboration between their police forces (Bangladesh Protidin, 2018). This strategic partnership reflects Bangladesh's effort to balance its relationships with both China and India, maintaining a careful equilibrium to secure its own strategic interests. While some analysts interpret China's increasing influence in Bangladesh as part of a broader "shadow war" in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) aimed at countering India's dominance (Pattanaik, 2006). Bangladesh views its ties with China as a vital source of security, enabling it to mitigate Indian influence.

The bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and China extends beyond arms trade and military aid, encompassing joint military training exercises and infrastructure development projects. Despite concerns from regional actors, Bangladesh continues to embrace opportunities for collaboration with China, thereby strengthening its strategic ties (Xinhua, 2021).

## **Transfer of Technology and Infrastructural Developments Projects of China in Bangladesh**

It should be mention here that strategic relationship between China and Bangladesh is, definitely, in favor of the both countries that the people and governments of these two neighboring countries can be greatly benefitted through trade and investments and implementation of the proposed economic corridors in the region. In 2016, during President Xi Jinping's state visit to Dhaka, China and Bangladesh elevated their bilateral relationship to a "strategic partnership of cooperation," signifying a pivotal shift in their diplomatic and economic ties (Bangladesh Protidin, 2017). This development occurred in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which sought to enhance regional and global connectivity, with Bangladesh playing a critical role due to its geopolitical and geostrategic location and infrastructural needs (Arefin, Rashid, & Habib, 2019). Notably, in 2015, China emerged as Bangladesh's largest trading partner (Datta, 2008), and their bilateral relations have since deepened, encompassing both military and commercial cooperation, as highlighted by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to China in 2019.

China is a technologically very advanced country in the East Asian region having very close connectivity with South and Southeast Asia, where, Bangladesh, being a small but geopolitical and geostrategically very significant country, can be enormously benefitted from the Chinese technology and development cooperation. China's engagement in Bangladesh's infrastructural development is exemplified by significant projects such as the Padma Rail Link and the Payra Deep Sea Port (Agarwal & Islam, 2015). In 2019, China secured access to Bangladesh's key seaports at Chittagong and Mongla. China had also expressed earlier interest in constructing a deep seaport at Sonadia (Kabir, 2017). Moreover, China's proposal to manage and rehabilitate the Teesta River raised strategic concerns for India, given the river's significance to both nations (Salam, Bhuiyan, & Nitu, 2020). The Bangladesh's people and its different stakeholders strongly support the Chinese engagement and development projects in Bangladesh that China is a strong economy with the largest foreign currency reserves in the world, where India lagging behind and the country's economic capacity is very poor compared to China. China can play a very big role in Bangladesh in terms of economic development, transfer of technology and regional connectivity through the BRI, BCIM economic corridor and Maritime Silk Road projects.

China has already proven its technological capacity, regional connectivity and development attitude in the region; and China's investment footprint in Bangladesh extends beyond infrastructure to the financial and technological sectors. In 2016, China invested in Bangladesh's stock market and ICT sector, and a Chinese mobile payments platform, acquired a 20% stake in bKash, a leading mobile financial service provider in the country (Karim & Liton, 2016). China has also funded several ICT initiatives, including the Info-Sarker project and a "digital connection" project (Hasan, Adhikary, & Roy, 2022). Proposals for further cooperation include the development of a "Smart City" and a metro train line in Chattogram, though some analysts have expressed skepticism about the feasibility of these projects (Hasan, Adhikary, & Roy, 2022). On the otherhand, some observers think that considering China's advanced economy and technology, it can be said that China's plans of investments in the different sectors such as computer software, hardware, electronics, automobile, different kinds of machineries, garment industries, infrastructural development projects in Bangladesh will be playing a significant role in economic growth and development along with the new job opportunities for the Bangladesh young generation.

## **Trade and Investments between China and Bangladesh**

Both China and Bangladesh doing very well in terms of economic growth and development; and these two countries have drawn global attention for their performance in terms of both trade and development and economic growth. Since the early 1990s, Bangladesh has experienced notable economic growth, while China has emerged as a global economic powerhouse over the past three decades (Small, A., 2015). This development has fostered increasingly robust business ties between the two nations. Among China's efforts to expand and deepen its international trade relations, Bangladesh has emerged as a significant partner, second only to Pakistan in South Asia in terms of Chinese investment. China is Bangladesh's largest trading partner, primarily due to the substantial volume of imports it supplies to the country. Moreover, the Chinese government committed to granting 97% of Bangladeshi exports duty-free access by 2020 (Karim, 2020). On the otherhand, Chinese products are being very popular among the Bangladeshi citizens for cheap price and availability in the markets. Particularly Bangladeshi businessmen have been importing Chinese automobiles, computers, laptops, electronics, different raw-materials and garment accessories.

Future trade relations between the two nations will be more attractive and fruitful because of regional connectivity and economic corridors between China and Bangladesh. However, significant economic relations between the two nations can be traced back to (2002 Singh, Z. D. 2021). During this period, Bangladesh's exports to China amounted to only \$19.1 million, while imports from China totaled \$64.2 million (Ihtesham & Mahabubur, 2005). By 2004, trade between the two countries had grown by 43.5%, reaching \$2.04 billion, with Chinese exports to Bangladesh increasing by 42.8%, amounting to \$1.91 billion. In 2005, China overtook India as Bangladesh's primary source of imports for the first time (The Daily Star, 2005). In the fiscal year 2005–2006, Bangladesh spent \$495.5 million on imports from China (Kumar, 2006). By 2008, the value of bilateral trade had increased to \$4.58 billion. During a visit to Bangladesh in the same year, the Chinese Foreign Minister pledged development aid totaling six million takas (Harun, 2010). From 2010 to 2011, bilateral trade between the two nations ranged between \$7 billion and \$8 billion (Islam, 2012). However, many analysts argue that China-Bangladesh financial relations can be divided into two distinct phases: pre-on and post-launch of China's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) initiative. Prior to 1977, China's investments in Bangladesh totaled only \$250 million (Ramachandran, 2019). With the advent of the OBOR initiative, China quickly became Bangladesh's most significant business partner and investor. Some scholars, however, suggest that China's rapid expansion into Bangladesh was part of a broader strategy to establish dominance in the Indian market (Chakma, 2019).

Experts on China-Bangladesh trade relations argue that addressing the trade imbalance between the two countries is critical to further strengthening bilateral relations. China has already removed tariffs on many Bangladeshi exports (Islam, Ailian, & Jie, 2018). Furthermore, trade specialists from both Beijing and Dhaka agree that a free trade agreement (FTA) would help reduce trade deficits between the two nations. According to Chinese economic expert Cheng Min, such an agreement "could exempt more Bangladeshi products from taxes, significantly reducing the trade imbalance"(Hasib, 2019). Both nations are actively working towards the establishment of a free trade zone to maintain strong economic relations and narrow Bangladesh's trade deficit with China, which currently stands at \$15 billion (Singh, 2019). A strong and balanced trade relations between the two nations can reduce the existing trade imbalance; and can help increase Bangladesh's exports to China based on free trade

agreement or reduced tariffs. Many Bangladeshi products very popular in neighboring Yunnan province of China; and being popularised in other provinces of China. Therefore, the policy makers and the government of Bangladesh should formulate trade policy so as to enhance Bangladesh's exports to China through which the country would be able to earn a huge amount foreign currencies.

### **China-Bangladesh Relations in the Context of Power Sector Development**

China has played a significant role in Bangladesh's power sector development, including the financing of coal-fired power stations and the largest power plant project, contributing 30% of the total cost (Prasain, 2021). Presently, three 1,320-megawatt units, with an estimated cost of \$4.5 billion, are under construction, forming part of a broader proposal for twelve dual-fuel power plants (Xinhua, 2019). In addition to conventional energy projects, China has also invested in Bangladesh's renewable energy sector, exemplified by a \$400 million joint venture aimed at developing a 500-megawatt renewable energy complex by 2023 (Raju, 2019). Strategically, China's involvement extends to strengthening Bangladesh's power sector. It should be mentioned that China's technology of power plantation and supply has drawn global attention; and the country is one of the leading power generation countries in the world. Bangladesh, being a load-shedding and power-scarce country, can learn from the Chinese technology; and China, being a largest power generating country in the region, can help Bangladesh solve energy problem.

### **China-Bangladesh Cooperation in the Context Public Health**

The Chinese health services are now very popular in both China and abroad; many people from the neighboring countries of South, Southeast, Northeast and Central Asian countries visit China for their better treatment. However, the longstanding collaboration between China and Bangladesh in the public health sector extends well before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting a sustained commitment to health cooperation. Notable initiatives include the deployment of a Chinese naval hospital ship to Chittagong in 2013 and a donation of \$4 million in medical equipment in 2015 (Prothom Alo, 2013; Prothom Alo, 2015). China increased its help for the COVID-19 epidemic, giving critical medical supplies such as testing kits, personal protective equipment, and other important resources to both the government and the business sector (Chinese Embassy, 2020). To boost this assistance, a team of Chinese medical professionals was dispatched to Bangladesh in June 2020 to assist with the pandemic response. In April 2020, the Alibaba Foundation offered major gifts, such as testing tools and face masks (Chinese Embassy, 2020). Despite some issues with the Sinovac vaccine in 2020, China's ongoing aid in tackling both the health crisis and its economic consequences demonstrates its commitment to the development of Bangladesh's health sectors (Dhaka Tribune, 2021). This collaboration emphasizes the vital significance of international cooperation in solving global public health concerns, illustrating how transnational collaboration can boost resilience and capability during times of crisis. The Chinese initiatives on controlling global health crisis and pandemic has been praised globally. Bangladesh is grateful to China for its cooperation and all-out support in the context of public health services and controlling of Covid-19.

### **China's Vision of Regional Connectivity and Development Cooperation in the Context of Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean**

The Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean are very important for China's expansion in terms her presence in both the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean. It is true that India is competing with

China in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean; because, these two rivalry countries are keenly interested in expanding their influence in the region. China's strategic maritime access objectives are intended to strengthen its geopolitical influence, particularly in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. These regions are strategically important, with the Indian Ocean being the world's third-largest ocean and a critical maritime corridor connecting Asia, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. These seas carry approximately one-fifth of all global marine traffic (Jiacheng 2017). For China, securing trade routes, safeguarding investments, and ensuring reliable energy supplies through the Indian Ocean are of utmost importance.

Bangladesh is an important country to both India and China. Bangladesh's strategic location at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal is especially significant as it serves as a gateway to South and Southeast Asia, providing proximity to key nations such as India and Myanmar. This geographical positioning aligns with China's broader geopolitical objectives in the region, emphasizing the dual aspects of competition and cooperation. Geopolitical and security considerations are integral to China's foreign policy, largely driven by its quest for resources to sustain its economic growth. Consequently, Bangladesh plays a critical role in China's geopolitical and security agenda (Halim, 1996). China's dependency on international seaborne trade, particularly energy imports, underscores its need for maritime access. Energy supplies are vital for developing an integrated national power system, with over 80% of China's imported energy from West Asia and Africa passing through the Indian Ocean before entering the Strait of Malacca (Len, 2015). As China's energy demands grow, its reliance on the Indian Ocean will likely increase. Despite concerns over India's influence in the region, China has been steadily establishing facilities along the Indian Ocean coastline to secure its interests (Holslag, J.2021).

China is a rapidly growing country that has various plans and programs so as to enhance her influence in both South and Southeast Asia including Middle-East and Africa. The framing of its maritime policy under the "Maritime Silk Road" (MSR) suggests that Beijing presents its initiatives as economically motivated. However, many analysts argue that these actions may also serve underlying military objectives. The MSR is part of China's broader One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, designed to revitalize trade links with Asia and Europe, with the MSR acting as its maritime counterpart (Aoyama, 2016). Critics of this approach often refer to it as a "string of pearls," indicative of a network of strategic facilities and ports that China is developing across the Indian Ocean (Brewster, 2017).

Bangladesh's strategic position on the northern Bay of Bengal aligns closely with China's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean. Key locations such as Chittagong and Cox's Bazar present potential sites for the "String of Pearls" initiative (Datta, S.2022). Establishing basing rights in these coastal areas would not only improve China's naval capabilities, but would also considerably increase its geopolitical influence in the region, allowing it to successfully challenge its competitors.

### **China-Bangladesh Cooperation in the Context Educational Development**

China is a very crucial country for Bangladesh that China has launched scholarships programs for international students including Bangladesh; and many students from Bangladesh are studying at the different Universities in China on Chinese government scholarship. Bangladesh and China have had a long and fruitful collaboration in education and culture since the

establishment of a Student Exchange Program in 1976. This program has enabled Bangladeshi students to further their studies in China, typically with the help of Chinese government scholarships. This effort has not only increased academic achievement but also strengthened interpersonal ties between the two countries, boosting cooperation and understanding. The two countries strengthened their cultural ties by signing the Cultural Cooperation Agreement in 1979. This agreement constituted a significant step toward strengthening bilateral cultural exchanges and collaboration.

Over the decades, these contacts have enhanced both countries' cultural landscapes, creating a greater understanding for each other's heritage and values. Furthermore, the tourist sector has developed as an important area of partnership, contributing significantly to both Bangladesh and China's economies. The influx of Chinese tourists to Bangladesh, and vice versa, has increased cultural understanding and economic ties, as well as boosted both nations' tourism industries. This comprehensive collaboration continues to play an important role in strengthening Bangladesh-China economic and cultural ties (Chakravarty, Pinak Ranjan. July 2020). It can be mentioned here that the proposed BCIM economic corridor and BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) will be playing very significant role in strengthening the economic, diplomatic and cultural ties between China and Bangladesh.

### **Bilateral Cooperation in the Context of Science and Technology**

Bangladesh needs strong cooperation from China in terms of science and technology that China is a globally leading country in terms of her science and technology, where Bangladesh can learn and can be benefitted by imitating and adopting Chinese technology. Bangladesh and China signed a major agreement in March 1978 known as the "Cooperation on Science and Technology," which was extended in 1990. Over the years, this collaboration has resulted in important advances, particularly in flood control, river channel management, and technology support for water conservation. Both countries have also launched collaborative research programs to solve these vital concerns. One of the most visible results of this collaboration has been the improvement of Bangladesh's flood forecasting system. China's provision of hydrological data from the Yarlung Zangbo River's upstream regions enabled this achievement. The exchange of this critical information has considerably improved Bangladesh's ability to forecast and mitigate flood-related calamities. In the 21st century, Bangladesh marked another milestone by becoming a stakeholder in China's "Small Multi-mission Satellite" program, underscoring the growing synergy between the two nations in the field of space technology. Additionally, Bangladesh and China have embarked on a collaborative effort to harness nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. This strategic cooperation is especially critical in addressing Bangladesh's increasing energy demands, providing a foundation for a stable and sustainable power supply for the nation (Source:<http://bd2.mofcom.gov.cn/sys/print.shtml>, January 6, 2014). China is the only country that can transfer its technology to her neighboring countries including Bangladesh to grow economically and technologically.

### **Socio-Economic, Political and Trade Challenges for India after the Fall of Sheikh Hasina Regime in Bangladesh**

India is facing some challenges in terms of socio-economic, political and trade challenges in Bangladesh. And Bangladesh is also facing some challenges in the context of exports and imports and medical tourism. Both governments are politically suspicious to each other on several issues like religious factors, cross border tensions, muslim and hindu minority issues,

travell and economic corridor issues etc. Moreover, Bangladesh's political scene is changing dramatically, particularly with the projected transition following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's departure in 2024. This move presents significant trade and economic concerns for India, particularly in light of Bangladesh's growing connections with China.

On the other hand, China is providing her helping hand on several politico-economic, security and trade and investments to many South Asian countries including Bangladesh, which is being blamed by India as a security threst to India. China's growing influence in Bangladesh fueled by Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments, may weaken India's regional economic position (Anderson, R. 2023). China's role as a significant partner, providing infrastructure investments and increased trade prospects, might expand if a new Bangladeshi administration aligns more closely with Beijing. This trend may limit India's access to key markets and boost competition from Chinese exports, increasing India's trade imbalances (Chowdhury & Haque, 2022). India's long-standing and steady trade links with Bangladesh may potentially be interrupted if the new government favors Chinese-supported infrastructure. Such reforms would raise expenses for Indian enterprises while disrupting exports (Bhatia, 2023). Furthermore, Bangladesh's increased relations with China may result in additional non-tariff barriers complicating trade with India, such as higher regulatory standards or customs procedures. These restrictions may reduce India's export competitiveness in areas like as textiles and medicines (Sharma, 2023). Finally, a new political regime may alter trade policies, potentially favoring protectionist measures or promoting partnerships that accord with the government's strategic objectives. According to Islam (2024), such changes in tariff rates and current trade agreements could cause uncertainty for Indian exporters. Many experts on Bangladesh-India relations also think that China, being a largest trading partner of Bangladesh, has huge economic capacity to support Bangladesh's growing economy with foreign direct investnens and transfer of technology, which might not be possible by India because of her fragile economy and political mismanagement centering on ethnic and religious politics and the political issues of Northeast India and border conflicts with both China and Pakistan.

### **Geostrategic, Geopolitical, Economic and Security Challenges for India**

After the fall of Sheikh Hasina's regime in Bangladesh, India is facing tough challenges in terms of geopolitical, economic and security challenges. South Asia's geopolitical dynamics have become increasingly complex, particularly as Bangladesh seeks to manage its connections with India and China in order to pursue its economic and strategic goals (Smith, 2023). India is concerned about the security of the Siliguri Corridor, a thin land route that connects Northeast India to the rest of the country, sometimes known as the "Chicken Neck" (Sharma, Gorla, & Mishra, 2011). These worries are exacerbated by continuous tensions between India and China over disputed territories like as Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, the South China Sea, and Taiwan. Despite India's assumption that Bangladesh will side with New Delhi in its tensions with China, Dhaka has remained neutral, calling for peaceful solutions (Rahman, M. 2024). Bangladesh has prioritized trade and development in its bilateral relations with India, downplaying immediate security concerns (Sharma et al. 2011). This pragmatic approach represents Bangladesh's goal of maximizing national interests and economic progress through diverse international interactions (Billah, 2020). However, China's growing influence in Bangladesh, as exemplified by programs such as BRI, may pose a threat to India's regional strategic position. While strong links between Bangladesh and India have been developed, the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government may cause major uncertainty in the future of these relations. The Sheikh Hasina's

regime was completely relied on India; and India controlled the foreign policy of Bangladesh, which many freedom fighters, civil society, students, right and left wing political parties, mass people, intellectuals, many interest groups and young generations of the country didn't like. That's why many students of the public and private universities in Bangladesh brought out several processions against the government policies; and they demonstrated on the streets; and many of them were killed in the movements. Now the ruling interim government of Bangladesh is trying to minimize the gap between Bangladesh and India regarding the recent political turmoil and misunderstanding. But the Indian government is reluctant to improve the relationship, which might not be good at all, as both India and Bangladesh was maintaining friendly relations for several decades since Bangladesh's independence in 1971.

### **Socio-Political and Economic Impact on India's Domestic Policies in the Context of Recent Political Upheaval in Bangladesh**

Following the recent political upheaval in Bangladesh, the Indian government has become frustrated that its loyal regime of Sheikh Hasina was fallen down; and they started to change their foreign policies regarding Bangladesh and minority Muslims living in India. Recent advances in India's internal policy, particularly the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), have caused serious concerns in Bangladesh (Ranjit Singh, (2021). These practices have caused concern among Bangladeshis, fueling fears of possible deportations of Bengali Muslims and other marginalized groups, thereby straining bilateral relations (Raghavan, 2013). If Bangladesh's political landscape evolves toward a government less willing to preserve strong connections with India, we may see a more hardline approach to these difficult topics, perhaps worsening tensions. In contrast, China-Bangladesh ties have improved, with increased economic cooperation and strategic alliances. China's expanding influence in Bangladesh, particularly through initiatives such as BRI, contrasts sharply with the traditional Bangladesh-India dynamic. As Bangladesh navigates these complex geopolitical currents, the interaction of its relations with India and China will have a considerable impact on its foreign policy decisions (Davis, A.2023). A change in leadership could cause Bangladesh to rethink its foreign policy goals, favoring closer connections with China, especially if internal mood moves toward skepticism about India's intentions and actions. It can be said here that if India doesn't come forward to improving the relationship between the two closely neighboring countries, India would be affected severely in terms of her geopolitical interests, security issues regarding the Northeast India, exports to Bangladesh, Pakistan-Kashmir issues, China-India border issues.

### **India-Bangladesh Relations in the Context of Rohingya Crisis and Teesta Issues**

It should be mentioned here that the Rohingya issue is a very much complicated in the context of the India-Bangladesh relationship that India has geopolitical, geostrategic, economic and security interest in Myanmar centering on Northeast India's ethnic and religious conflicts. That's why India always supports the military junta on all issues relating to ethnic, religious, cultural and border conflicts with other countries including Bangladesh. India is committed to prevail its sovereignty over Northeast India through maintaining a warm relationship with military junta of Myanmar; that's why India doesn't support Bangladesh regarding the issues of Rohingya influx to the Southeast Bangladesh. However, the Rohingya refugee crisis and Teesta issue have complicated the Bangladesh-India relations since India has been silent on Rohingya issue; and did not support Bangladesh's efforts to repatriate the displaced Rohingya refugees to the home land, Myanmar. Because, India wants to prevail her sovereignty on

Northeast India by controlling ethnic insurgency with the military support from the military junta of Myanmar. In recent years, the strengthening of strategic connections between China and Bangladesh has complicated India-Bangladesh relations, which were formerly solid. While it is premature to declare a clear schism between Dhaka and Delhi, there has been a noticeable shift in India's diplomatic strategy (Kumaraswamy, P. R. 2011). The continuing Rohingya refugee crisis is a major contributing cause to this trend. The recent deal between Bangladesh and Myanmar on the repatriation of Rohingya refugees, which was purportedly helped by Chinese intervention, has forced India to reconsider its own position. Whereas India formerly supported Myanmar, it is now prioritizing Bangladesh's concerns on the matter. This recalibration is considered as part of a larger shift in India's foreign policy toward Bangladesh, with observers seeing parallels with India's diplomatic relations with Nepal (The Diplomat, October 2020). As Bangladesh's connections with China strengthen, the issue arises if this shift in dynamics will enable Bangladesh to use its position to resolve other long-standing problems with India, particularly over the Teesta River. The Teesta water-sharing arrangement remains a source of disagreement between the two neighbors, and Bangladesh may seek to leverage its strategic alliance with China to win concessions from India on this subject. According to Masum Billah (2020), Bangladesh's bargaining strength has increased in tandem with its strategic importance in the region, owing mostly to its ties with China. However, the ongoing Rohingya situation continues to present complications. After Sheikh Hasina's government fall, the current administration in Bangladesh is ambivalent toward India. Such a government may seek more aggressive international support, thereby reducing India's regional importance (Sikder, 2023). This shifting dynamic affects India's position in South Asia, especially as Bangladesh seeks larger international partnerships to solve domestic and geopolitical concerns. Both India and China should come forward to resolving the Rohingya issues amicably with Myanmar that Bangladesh is country in South and Southeast Asia that is very essential for China's regional connectivity and economic corridor in the region; and, on the other hand, India needs Bangladesh to prevail her sovereignty on the Northeast India. It is true that India can't prevail her sovereignty on the Northeast India without the support and cooperation of Bangladesh; that the region is insurgency prone and ethnically divided. The seven-sister is very close to both China and Bangladesh in terms of the geopolitical and geostrategic position; if India doesn't maintain friendly relations with Bangladesh it would be a security to India and her national interests.

### **Bangladesh's Foreign Policy Shift and Implications on the Sino-Indian Enmity**

The falling down of the Awami League government in Bangladesh led by Sheikh Hasina has significant implications for both India and China that both India and Bangladesh have changed their foreign policy; and Bangladesh is thinking of emphasizing her relationship with China that the strong relationship between China and Bangladesh would very be powerful and effective to protect Bangladesh and China's regional and security interests in the region. The fall of the Awami League government of Bangladesh could result in a substantial shift in the country's foreign policy, particularly in its relations with China and India. Bangladesh, led by the Awami League, has struck a delicate balance between these two regional powerhouses, gaining economic and infrastructure gains from China while maintaining historically close ties with India. However, a change in leadership might alter this dynamic, perhaps moving Bangladesh closer to China and intensifying the existing China-India competition in South Asia. China's expanding influence in Bangladesh, as evidenced by initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is part of Beijing's overall aim to strengthen its presence in South Asia and the

Indian Ocean Region (Rehman, 2009). This strategic expansion immediately confronts India's long-standing dominance in Bangladesh and the wider region. If the new government after the Awami League pursues a foreign policy that is more closely aligned with Beijing, it could cause significant diplomatic friction between Dhaka and New Delhi, as India views China's regional activities with deep suspicion, particularly in light of ongoing border disputes and competition in maritime spaces such as the Indian Ocean.

India's worries would expand beyond geopolitics and security to include regional trade and diplomacy. A closer convergence between Bangladesh and China could undermine India's leadership in regional forums like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), where both countries have traditionally attempted to expand their influence (Pant, H. V. 2010). Bangladesh's strategic location, particularly its access to the Bay of Bengal, is critical to both China and India's marine interests. A tilt toward China could cause more division within BIMSTEC, impeding India's efforts to construct a unified South Asian response to economic and security concerns while also enhancing China's prominence in these forums (Garver, J. W. 2001). The broader consequences of this rivalry could manifest in a variety of ways. First, greater Chinese influence in Bangladesh may exacerbate India's security concerns, notably in the Indian Ocean, where China is increasing its naval presence. Second, as Bangladesh becomes a more important ally for China in its Belt and Road Initiative, India may step up its diplomatic efforts to counterbalance China's growing presence, possibly through stronger ties with other South Asian countries or multilateral organizations such as the Quad (Mohan, C. R. 2020). Third, South Asia's economic dynamics may evolve, with Bangladesh becoming more integrated into China's economic network, possibly at the expense of its historically strong trading links with India. But, the Indian government its leadership doesn't understand the geopolitical and regional importance of Bangladesh; and doesn't admit Bangladesh's role positively, rather tries to undermine Bangladesh's interests and security in many ways.

However, in the long run, China-India rivalry over Bangladesh may spill over into larger regional and global concerns, affecting not just South Asia's internal stability but also the global balance of power. As China emerges as a global power and India seeks to expand its influence, Bangladesh's foreign policy will become increasingly significant for determining the region's geopolitical landscape. China has been able to understand the role and geopolitical significance of Bangladesh; but, India has not been able to realize the geostrategic, regional and geopolitical importance of Bangladesh. That's why India would be suffering in long run in the context of Sino-Indian rivalry and enmity.

### **Diplomatic Relations between India and Bangladesh**

The expected formation of a government in Bangladesh that is less friendly to India may force a reconsideration of diplomatic relations, substantially affecting regional cooperation on a range of fronts, including security and counterterrorism measures. Bipul B. Das contends in his 2023 article published in the South Asian Journal of International Relations that a hostile or apathetic Bangladesh might severely hamper India's ability to work on crucial transnational issues like as climate change and migration management. This breakdown in cooperative dynamics may jeopardize existing regional security frameworks while also hampering efforts to address critical global issues that require collaborative action. As a result, the shifting political scenario in Bangladesh poses a serious risk to India's strategic goals in South Asia,

prompting a full assessment of its diplomatic strategy and regional engagement policies (Ganguly, Sumit. July 2020). That's why India should not undermine Bangladesh's interests and come closer to Bangladesh so as to protect the interests of both Bangladesh and India in the region. It is better for all stakeholders in the region that they should try their level best to maintain a peaceful co-existence with political stability and economic prosperity.

### **The Reshaping of South Asia's Balance of Power: The China-Bangladesh Strategic Alliance Amid Bangladesh's Political Shift**

The South Asian geopolitics and balance of power are being rapidly changed due to recent change in the foreign policy and domestic politics in both Bangladesh and India. The geopolitical landscape of South Asia is shifting dramatically, notably with the formation of a strategic cooperation between Beijing and Dhaka (Pant, H. V., & Joshi, Y. 2018). Historically dominated by India, the region is seeing a shift in power dynamics, thanks partly to Bangladesh's greater engagement with China under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership. This collaboration, defined by economic cooperation and infrastructural investment, is crucial in light of Bangladesh's political transition to authoritarian control, which raises questions about democratic governance and accountability (Rahman, 2021). Beijing has been a major investor in Bangladesh, as seen by projects such as the Padma Bridge and deep-sea ports funded by BRI. This alliance not only strengthens Bangladesh's economic prospects, but also positions it strategically against India's long-standing influence (Riaz, A.2019). According to Chowdhury (2018), Bangladesh's foreign policy is increasingly driven by a desire for balance, with the country depending on connections with China to counter Indian dominance. The implications of this alliance extend beyond bilateral relations. As Bangladesh develops its ties with China, neighboring nations may follow suit, potentially altering the regional power balance.

Many countries in South, Southeast and Middle-East have shown positive attitude towards China because of her technological and economic supports to those countries. And China has come out as a major development cooperation country in the world after the cold-war era. Moreover, countries such as Sri Lanka and Pakistan have already expressed a desire in strengthening ties with China, perhaps leading to a realignment of South Asian alliances (Kumar, 2019). Furthermore, the China-Bangladesh partnership has significant implications for South Asia's geopolitical landscape. With Bangladesh's internal political instability and strategic ties, India's long-held dominance is being challenged. The future of South Asian geopolitics will be defined by how these dynamics play out in the coming years, underlining the need of India rethinking its foreign policy plans in light of these trends. It can be mentioned here that Bangladesh has never tried to align with any powerful country on her security and other national interests. But, recent foreign policy attitude of India towards Bangladesh, compelled the government of Bangladesh and its people to align with China to protect her security and economic interests in the region.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Sino-South Asian relations are potential for the region's political stability and economic development; but, due to India's security concern on China's involment in the region, is hampering the prospects of the region in long run. Both China and India, as major regional actors, should work together for the interests of the region. Sino-Indian or Indo-Bangladesh rivalry is not expected in the region to maintain peace and prosperity. However, to put it simply, the evolving China-Bangladesh strategic alliance in the twenty-first century presents

both opportunities and threats to regional security, particularly for India. Deepening ties between Beijing and Dhaka, including defense, trade, investment, education, and infrastructure projects, point to a growing Chinese presence with the potential to shift the geopolitical balance in South Asia. India, as a major regional player, must respond strategically, trying to maintain its influence in Bangladesh while fostering regional peace. This analysis underlines the vital significance of agility and sophisticated policymaking in India's approach, as strategic dynamics shift with China's expanding influence. In addition, a potential political shift in Bangladesh, such as the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government, could worsen the regional situation. The forthcoming government could change its foreign policy toward China, affecting Bangladesh-India relations, particularly in economic and security cooperation. Given these possibilities, India's strategic interests necessitate a measured, cautious response to manage shifting allegiances and prevent further loss of regional power. As a result, the China-Bangladesh alliance, especially given Bangladesh's internal political dynamics, requires India's active and flexible participation to safeguard its long-term interests in South Asia. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has to play a pivotal role in maintaining regional integration and economic cooperation among the South Asian countries, where China has a role to come ahead with development cooperation, trade and investments, economic corridor, transfer of technology and foreign aid to these South Asian developing countries. China can be hugely benefitted from a politically stable and economically prosperous South Asia including Bangladesh and India.

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