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China- Bangladesh Strategic Alliance in the 21st Century: Implications for India Following of Bangladesh's Recent Political Shift

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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 strategy. This article investigates the emerging strategic partnership between China and Bangladesh, examining its ramifications for India, particularly in light of Bangladesh's recent political upheavals. As China strengthens commercial and defense ties with Bangladesh, India's traditional regional influence faces an increasing threat. The study investigates how Bangladesh's growing reliance on Chinese investments and military backing could shift the balance of power, threaten India's security, and impact regional stability. By studying the alliance's political, economic, and security factors, this article aims to provide a thorough understanding of its possible impact on India's geopolitical strategy and broader South Asian dynamics.

Key Words: China-Bangladesh Strategic Alliance, South Asian Geopolitics, India's Regional Influence, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Security Cooperation, Bangladesh's Political Shift

Introduction

The geopolitical environment of South Asia has changed dramatically in the 21st century, with China's expanding influence reshaping regional dynamics. China's growing economic and political might has led to a strategic 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 infrastructure development. These domestic interests have aligned with China's regional ambitions, increasing

bilateral partnership. India, which has traditionally wielded enormous power over Bangladesh's foreign and strategic policies, has expressed alarm as the country has become more allied with China. The growing China-Bangladesh collaboration creates new problems for India's geopolitical policy, 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 report analyzes the broader implications for India's regional dominance 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 strategic recalibrations India may need to consider in response to the shifting dynamics of the China-Bangladesh relationship.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach, incorporating primary as well as secondary data, to investigate China's strategic relationship with Bangladesh and its consequences for India in the twenty-first century. The methodology is based on the collecting, analysis, and synthesis of numerous forms of material, such as books, journal articles, theses, and newspaper reports, to provide a full knowledge of the geopolitical processes at play.

Literature Review

A comprehensive literature research was undertaken to better comprehend the China-Bangladesh relationship's historical, economic, and political environment. Scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and doctorate theses were used to gain insight into the growth of China's foreign policy in South Asia, with a particular emphasis on Bangladesh's political scene. These sources served to explain Bangladesh's foreign policy developments under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, as well as China's regional goals through BRI initiatives. The assessment also discussed India's historical influence over Bangladesh and how China's growing presence is upending the existing quo.

The literature review focuses on

- 1) The historical ties between China and Bangladesh dating back to the 1970s.
- 2) China's increasing influence through investment and cooperation in defense
- 3) Bangladesh's domestic political changes and alignment with China.
- 4) India's geopolitical ambitions and concerns regarding security over the China-Bangladesh alliance

Limitations of the Study

This study discloses several limitations, such as potential biases in media coverage and the availability of primary documents from government archives. Furthermore, the geopolitical character of the research issue means that diplomatic developments can change quickly, and conclusions may be influenced by future political changes in the region.

Concept of Strategic Alliances

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 Strategic Alliance

In the twenty-first century, China and Bangladesh's strategic partnership has grown dramatically as geopolitical, economic, and security objectives have all converged. Bangladesh sees China as an important partner in its economic growth, modernization, and infrastructural development, particularly BRI Initiative (Rajaratnam, S., & Paul, T. V. 2019). Bangladesh gives critical access to the Bay of Bengal, bolstering China's position in the Indian Ocean, in line with its overall maritime policy.

Key Aspects of the China-Bangladesh Strategic Alliance

1. **Economic Cooperation:** China is Bangladesh's largest trading partner and a key source of direct investment. The two nations have signed a number of trade agreements to strengthen economic connections, making it easier to export Bangladeshi goods to Chinese markets.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Significant Chinese investment in Bangladeshi infrastructure projects is a key feature of their relationship. Notable projects include the Padma Bridge, the expansion of Dhaka's metro train system, and the establishment of special economic zones. These projects are critical for Bangladesh's economic growth and seek to improve the country's transportation networks.
3. **Bilateral Trade and Investment:** The two countries' trade volume has expanded significantly, with China importing clothes, leather goods, and jute from Bangladesh. Furthermore, Chinese corporations have made

significant investments in industries such as energy, telecommunications, and manufacturing.

4. **Diplomatic Engagement:** Bangladesh maintains a balance in its foreign ties with China and Western nations. Bangladesh's strategic cooperation with China has given it with a powerful partner in international forums, backing its positions on a variety of topics such as climate change and sustainable development.
5. **Regional Stability:** China's presence in Bangladesh helps to maintain regional stability by supporting economic development and eliminating poverty, which is consistent with its overall goals in South Asia.

Describe the Long and Complicated History of Ties Between China and Bangladesh

China and Bangladesh have a long history, dating back over two millennia and centered on the expansion of Buddhism. In 1038 AD, Atisha Dipankar Sriyana, a prominent scholar and monk from the region that is now Bangladesh, traveled to Tibet during the reign of the Great Buddhist Pala Kingdom. His profound influence on the propagation of Buddhism significantly impacted religious developments in East Asia, including in ancient China (Zhang, 2010). These early connections were further strengthened through the visits of Chinese scholars, monks, and travelers to the Bengal region, which contributed to the gradual development of diplomatic ties between the two nations (Jashim, 2011). One significant diplomatic milestone occurred when Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1950. Additionally, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the future leader of Bangladesh, made diplomatic visits to China in 1953 and 1957. A notable symbolic gesture occurred in 1963 when a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim visited Atish Dipankar's grave (Jashim, 2011). However, the Sino-Bangladesh relationship faced challenges during the period leading to Bangladesh's independence in 1971. China advocated for a political resolution to the East Pakistan conflict and expressed concern over the mistreatment of the people in East Pakistan during the independence struggle (Ibne, 2010). After Bangladesh gained independence, China formally recognized the new nation in 1975, marking the beginning of steadily improving diplomatic relations. China's principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations has been a critical factor in strengthening its relationship with Bangladesh (Chowdhury, I. A. 2020). Since the formal establishment of diplomatic ties in 1976, high-level visits between the leadership of both countries have played a pivotal role in enhancing bilateral relations. Prominent figures such as Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Mohammad Ershad made significant official visits during this period (Zeitlin, 2005).

Despite apprehensions from neighboring India, the pattern of robust diplomatic engagement between China and Bangladesh persisted. Economic agreements, visa waivers, and cooperation across various sectors further bolstered

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bilateral ties. In 2010, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited China to secure support for several key national initiatives (Harun or Rashid, 2010). This visit was followed by a similar diplomatic visit by opposition leader Khaleda Zia, signaling the bipartisan commitment to deepening relations with China. Trade relations between the two countries have witnessed substantial growth, serving as a crucial driver of the strengthened alliance. President Xi Jinping's visit to Bangladesh in 2016 marked a significant moment in the relationship, with expanded financial aid, economic collaboration, and strategic cooperation (Takendra, 2016). The political stability of Bangladesh and the relatively low level of domestic political conflict have been essential factors in sustaining strong bilateral ties.

In 2019, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to China further solidified relations, drawing global attention to Bangladesh's strategic significance as a key partner for China (Joyeeta, 2019). In 2021, China's Minister of National Defense, Wei Fenghe, visited Bangladesh, emphasizing the deepening of military cooperation (Xinhua, 2021). The rapid economic growth of China and its aim to foster long-term alliances have found a promising partner in Bangladesh, given the latter's remarkable economic progress in recent years (Kabir, 2017). This enduring and evolving relationship illustrates the mutual benefits and strategic importance of Sino-Bangladesh ties within the broader contemporary geopolitical context.

Strategic Alliance Dynamics

1) Connections in the Field of Defense and Armed Forces

China has emerged as a significant player in ensuring Bangladesh's security, primarily through the provision 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.

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).

2) Infrastructure Development in Bangladesh funded by China

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 global connectivity, with Bangladesh playing a critical role due to its 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's engagement in Bangladesh's infrastructure 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, with plans to support the development of the latter. 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).

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 Alipay, 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).

3) Economic Cooperation

3.1) Business Partnership

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 business 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).

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- 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 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).

3.2) Industries Relating to Power

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.

3.3) Subsector of the Public Health Workforce

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 (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.

4) China's marine access strategy aims to increase its geopolitical influence

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

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traffic (Jiacheng 2017). For China, securing trade routes, safeguarding investments, and ensuring reliable energy supplies through the Indian Ocean are of utmost importance.

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).

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.

5) Educational and Cultural Dimension

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).

5.1) Science and Technology Dimension

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. (Mofcom, January 6, 2014)

5) China-Bangladesh Growing Relations and Regional Stability

The expanding links between China and Bangladesh have consequences for regional stability, especially in light of India-China relations. While Bangladesh seeks to use its connection with China for economic development, it must strike a delicate balance of regional power dynamics. Increased Chinese influence in Bangladesh could raise concerns in India, ultimately leading to increased tensions in South Asia (Ghosh, 2022). In contrast, the partnership might promote regional collaboration by encouraging growth in infrastructure and economic interdependence, perhaps reducing the likelihood of violence (Choudhury, S. 2020). Furthermore, because both countries have common goals in battling

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terrorism and supporting economic growth, their cooperation could help to create a more stable regional environment (Rahman, M. 2021).

Implications of a Shift in Political Power in Bangladesh

The impending collapse of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League administration, a known close friend of India, raises severe concerns about the future of Bangladesh-India relations, particularly as China grows its presence in Bangladesh's infrastructure, military, and economic sectors. Given India's geopolitical ambitions and China's growing influence in South Asia, such a move might have far-reaching implications for India and Bangladesh bilateral relation (Kumaraswamy, P. R. 2011). To comprehend the implications of these shifting dynamics, it is critical to examine them through many lenses: historical linkages, economic engagements, security concerns, and regional geopolitics.

The Dynamics Tapestry of India-Bangladesh Relations

From 1947 to 2023, India-Bangladesh relations have been shaped by various historical, political, and geopolitical settings. Bengal was a vital part of British India before 1947, and famous people such as Rabindranath Tagore and Subhas Chandra Bose contributed heavily to the anti-colonial movement. Despite being rectified, the partition of Bengal in 1905 created political tensions that predicted future splits (Jalal, Ayesha. 1985). East Bengal became East Pakistan after Partition in 1947, creating a separate political split from India while maintaining cultural links. However, West Pakistan's neglect of East Pakistan's interests fueled rising resentment (Rahman, Ataur.1984).

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 represented a watershed moment in bilateral ties. India, led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, supported Bangladesh's independence cause, culminating in military intervention in December 1971 (Pant, Harsh V. 2016). This resulted in the formation of Bangladesh, with India being one of the first to recognize the new country (Jacob, Happymon.2015). The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed in 1972, establishing the groundwork for future cooperation. Nonetheless, difficulties quickly arose. Border disputes, water-sharing issues, particularly along the Ganges, and trade imbalances caused periodic difficulties. Bangladesh's political volatility, notably the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, exacerbated the relationship as several administrations in Dhaka adjusted their foreign policy toward India.

Bangladesh's return to democracy in 1991 under Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, followed by Sheikh Hasina's leadership, signaled a period of increased participation. The Ganges Water Treaty, agreed in 1996 by Sheikh Hasina and Indian Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, was a significant accomplishment that addressed one of the key sources of bilateral conflict (Ganguly, Sumit. 2002). During Sheikh Hasina's second term, which began in 2009, relations grew stronger, with increased collaboration in counterterrorism, energy, and trade. A

significant breakthrough occurred in 2015 with the signing of the Land Boundary Agreement, which settled long-standing boundary disputes, including the exchange of enclaves. Economic support from India and expanding bilateral trade boosted ties during this period (Sisson, Richard, and Leo E. Rose, 1990).

Despite these improvements, difficulties remained. The Rohingya refugee crisis that followed Myanmar's 2017 exodus strained relations, with Bangladesh requesting additional international support from India (Sikder, Shafqat Munir.2023). Furthermore, India's domestic policies, particularly the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), sparked concern in Bangladesh about the expulsion of illegal migrants (Ranjit Singh.2021).

In recent years, India and Bangladesh have increased collaboration, particularly in infrastructure, energy, and regional connectivity (Mohsin, Amena.2021). Both countries have collaborated on initiatives through the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which represent their common economic and strategic goals. India's broader Indo-Pacific strategy has also influenced its relationship with Bangladesh, as both countries strive to maintain strong connections while dealing with regional geopolitical difficulties (Sinha, Uttam Kumar.2006).

Trade and Economic Challenges for India in Bangladesh Post-Sheikh Hasina Era

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.

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.

Geopolitical and Security Challenges for India

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.

Impact on India's Domestic Policies

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). Future diplomatic contacts may be affected if the Sheikh Hasina government's political stability, which has been typified by its pro-India posture, deteriorates. 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.

Rohingya Crisis and Teesta Issues

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. If Sheikh Hasina's government falls, a prospective successor administration may take a less cooperative approach 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.

Bangladesh's Foreign Policy Shift and Impact on The China-India Rivalry

The fall of Bangladesh's Awami League government 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

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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.

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.

Diplomatic Relations

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).

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

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.

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.

Conclusions

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

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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.

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