

Post-2024 Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations: Political Transition and Pragmatic Bilateral Realignment

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ABSTRACT: The 2024 political transition in Bangladesh has ushered in a new chapter in Pakistan–Bangladesh relations. The departure of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 ended the Awami League’s long-standing political supremacy and provided room for a reconsideration of Bangladesh’s internal and external goals. The establishment of the interim government under Muhammad Yunus did not lead to an immediate shift in Bangladesh’s foreign policy but it did pave the way for a more flexible diplomatic arena where Dhaka could revisit its ties with regional partners like Pakistan. This research consequently discusses the impact of leadership change in Bangladesh on the direction, tone, and substance of PAK–Bangladesh relations after 2024. This qualitative research examines the post-August 2024 period and discusses PAK–Bangladesh ties in three main sectors: diplomacy, economy, and strategic collaboration.

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Introduction

The 2024 political transition in Bangladesh has ushered in a new chapter in Pakistan–Bangladesh relations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the resignation and departure of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 ended the Awami League’s long-standing political supremacy and provided room for a reconsideration of Bangladesh’s internal and external goals. The establishment of the interim government under Muhammad Yunus did not lead to an immediate shift in Bangladesh’s foreign policy, but it did pave the way for a more flexible diplomatic arena where Dhaka could revisit its ties with regional partners like Pakistan. The chapter consequently discusses the impact of leadership change in Bangladesh on the direction, tone, and substance of PAK–BGD relations after 2024. The legacy of 1971, unsolved historical issues, and domestic political narratives of Bangladesh have historically hampered PAK–BGD relations. Relations with Pakistan were often politically delicate under Awami League governments, due to the close association of the Awami League’s legitimacy with the memories of the Liberation War. Consequently, diplomatic interactions between Dhaka and Islamabad remained restricted, and episodes of cooperation were frequently interrupted by historical conflicts, notably issues of apologies, war crimes, stranded Pakistanis/Biharis, and asset split. But the post-2024 transition eased some of the immediate political constraints on interaction with Pakistan.

This chapter examines the post-August 2024 period and discusses PAK-BGD ties in three main sectors: diplomacy, economy, and strategic collaboration. The diplomatic aspect is crucial because fresh political engagement and official contacts show whether the two governments are ready to move beyond symbolic antagonism. The economic factor is of great importance because bilateral commerce has been below potential given the size of the two markets. For instance, Pakistan's exports to Bangladesh were recorded at over \$661 million in FY2023-24, whilst imports from Bangladesh were at only under \$57 million, reflecting a highly restricted and unequal trading relationship (Dawn, 2025). As to the UN COMTRADE data, the value of Pakistan's exports to Bangladesh is around US\$731.47 million as of 2025, which implies that there is room for economic growth if the political links are strengthened (Trading Economics, 2026). The strategic dimension is especially important, as the politics of South Asia is shaped by the competition between India and Pakistan, China's engagement in the region, and Bangladesh's drive for more diplomatic independence. It also seeks to evaluate whether the 2024 political transition resulted in substantial changes in Pakistan–Bangladesh relations, or whether the improvement was transient and tactical. It studies the impact of leadership change on diplomatic relations, political rhetoric, institutional procedures, trade opportunities, and regional considerations. This answers directly the second research question of the study: what post-transition developments have occurred in PAK-BGD diplomatic ties, economic partnerships, and strategic cooperation? It also helps meet the study objectives by evaluating the impact of Bangladesh's leadership transition on its diplomatic relations with Pakistan, tracking the evolution of bilateral relations after 2024, and determining whether the evolving partnership is a permanent cooperation or a transitory alliance.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines how Pakistan and Bangladesh's ties have changed after Bangladesh's political shift in August 2024. It evaluates the departure of Sheikh Hasina and the interim setup that began under Muhammad Yunus. The focus is on whether the relationship shifted in direction or tone. The study looks at three main areas. First is diplomatic contact, second is economic cooperation, and third is strategic and security ties. It also tracks events like more high-level political talks. It looks at regular diplomatic meetings. It includes connectivity projects. It reviews defense-related exchanges and also considers work on non-traditional security issues.

Research Methodology

A qualitative case-study approach is employed to examine the transformation of Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations following Bangladesh's 2024 political transition. The study primarily relies on secondary and documentary sources. A process-oriented analysis is used to analyse how the political transition affected the bilateral engagement and subsequent development of both states.

Diplomatic Relations after 2024

The first area of change to become visible after the transition of 2024 was Diplomatic relations. This is the time when Pakistan and Bangladesh could resume formal relations that had been either dormant or underdeveloped for several years. It was a symbolic change, as well as high-level meetings, consultations at the foreign secretary's level, ministerial visits, facilitation for visas, and the use of more positive political language. The developments indicate that the two countries started to view diplomatic engagement as beneficial for regional stability, trade and people-to-people contact. The improvement needs to be taken with a grain of salt, though. This by no means meant that every historical debate was settled. Rather, the two states appeared to focus on functional collaboration, and the most sensitive historical factors were to be solved on the diplomatic plane over the course of time. It is a provisional step, and a step back, from the politics of emotion and memory to politics of interests.

Restoration of Political Dialogue

One of the most telling signs of the changes in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations was the revival of political dialogue after 2024 (Jalal et al., 2025). Shortly after the formation of the interim government, Pakistan started talks with the new government in Dhaka. On 27 August 2024, the High Commissioner of Pakistan, Mr Syed Ahmed Maroof, met with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus. The meeting was important as it was held just weeks after Hasina's resignation and demonstrated Islamabad's willingness to reach out to the new interim government (Government of Pakistan, Pakistan High Commissioner calls on Chief Adviser of Bangladesh's Interim Government, 2024). Multilateral dialogues at the high level remained ongoing. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a meeting with Chief Adviser of Bangladesh Muhammad Yunus on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2024. The meeting was important as it provided both sides with an opportunity to discuss bilateral cooperation at the highest political level soon after the transition. The two leaders met again in December 2024 on the margins of the D-8 Summit in Cairo, where they pledged to enhance and extend bilateral ties, including collaboration in commerce and other sectors (Sajid, 2024). These sessions demonstrated that both parties were willing to use international forums as impartial venues for the recovery of political confidence.

The Sixth Round of Foreign Secretary-level Bilateral Consultations between Pakistan and Bangladesh took place in Dhaka on 17th April 2025, after a 15-year gap. The Pakistan side was led by Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch, and the Bangladesh side was led by Foreign Secretary Md. Jashim Uddin. The consultation covered a broad agenda including political relations, trade and investment, agriculture, education, cultural exchanges, defence cooperation, regional connectivity and multilateral cooperation (Government of Pakistan, Sixth Round of Pakistan-Bangladesh Bilateral Consultations, 2025). It is worth noting that the 15-year gap reflects the dormancy of official diplomatic channels before the post-2024 openness.

The formal visit to Dhaka on 23-24 August, 2025 of Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, provided a significant boost to the restoration of talks. This was the first visit of a Pakistani foreign minister to Bangladesh in roughly 13 years (Government of Pakistan, 2025). The visit was diplomatically important due to the timing and the level of the visit. It showed that the connection had progressed beyond normal ambassadorial interaction to a greater level of political contact. During the visit, the two sides discussed boosting cooperation in areas such as trade, culture, media, training, and travel.

The return of political discourse also reflected the role of the temporary government led by Yunus. The interim administration was less constrained by Pakistan's political sensitivity toward the Awami League. This made it possible for Dhaka to look at Islamabad more relaxed without directly making it an issue of unresolved 1971. The interim government's approach was more pragmatic, not denying the country's previous issues but working on the aspects related to diplomatic normalisation, regional cooperation, and economic opportunities. The revival of relations with Bangladesh was advantageous for Pakistan in domestic and diplomatic politics. Islamabad's better relations with Dhaka have helped it reduce its South Asian diplomatic isolation and build new muscle with a large Muslim-majority country and new trade and connectivity opportunities in the region. The encounter with Pakistan was part of the strategy implemented after the transition to diversify Bangladesh's external relations and to cut dependence on India.

The political discussion and return in 2024, therefore, was not just a ceremony. It opened up official communication in a regular format and revived dormant processes and a platform for discussion of issues of cooperation as well as of existing differences. The discussions between foreign secretaries, held in 2025, and the visit of Ishaq Dar to Dhaka were particularly important, as they marked the beginning of the institutionalization of this new diplomatic space.

Softening of Political Rhetoric

Post-2024, Pakistan and Bangladesh also had political relations that were conducive. In the past, particularly during the rule of the Awami League, debates on Pakistan's unfinished business of 1971, the war crimes tribunals, and the lack of proper recognition of history by Pakistan mostly revolved around these issues. This led to a political debate over bilateral engagement in Bangladesh. The tone of official statements, however, changed after the change, becoming more cooperative and future-oriented. After 2024, the discourse of both sides progressively emphasized “mutual respect,” “regional peace,” “economic cooperation,” and “people-to-people exchanges.” For example, Pakistan’s official account of the meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus on the sidelines of the 80th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2025 described the meeting as “warm and cordial” and said the two leaders discussed cooperation in trade, regional connectivity, and people-to-people exchanges (Government of Pakistan, 2025). That sort of language is the result of a conscious effort to put the connection in a positive, not confrontational, light. Bangladesh, too, adopted a more receptive tone towards involvement, during a meeting between Pakistan’s High Commissioner Imran Haider and Foreign Affairs Adviser Md. Touhid Hossain in October 2025, the Bangladesh side noted that recent high-level exchanges and meetings of institutional mechanisms had generated positive momentum which should be sustained (Government of Pakistan, 2025). This kind of language is crucial as it indicates that Dhaka was not considering any contact with Pakistan as politically unacceptable. It did acknowledge, however, that there had been some steps taken in the past to pave the way for continued co-operation.

It was also evident in media and policy debates, as there was a shift in language. The relationship is also dubbed by the regional and international media as a “thaw” or “reset” since Hasina's ouster. During the same period, in August 2025, when Dhaka was having a complex relationship with India, Pakistan's foreign minister made a visit to Bangladesh to boost the relationship (Al Jazeera, 2025). The Diplomat also read the visit as 're-engagement, not alignment,' which meant that Bangladesh was not necessarily aligning itself with Pakistan's side, but was keen to normalize ties after years of isolation (Rahman, 2025). This distinction helps to appreciate the change on a scholarly level, as it does not overestimate the change. Softening of rhetoric was also linked to the improvement of the work. The first cargo ship from Karachi docked in Chittagong in November, 2024 and initiated direct sea trade links between the two countries after a long period of minimal communication. It is believed to be able to transport about 2300 TEUs in total, and the event was viewed as being a significant manifestation of the strengthening of commercial and diplomatic ties (Xinhua, 2026). Anything shipping was an economic matter, but symbolically, it was a diplomatic issue: both governments were in tune with reducing practical obstacles to contact.

Another important aspect was the facilitation of visas. As part of the bilateral visa exemption, Bangladesh also signed an agreement for the holders of diplomatic and official passports of Pakistan in August 2025. The agreement was said to be in effect for 5 years and allows the holders of official and diplomatic passports to travel without visas. This was significant due to the political mistrust that the visa restrictions had long brought to mind for a long time (Sakib, 2025). A relaxation of these restrictions made it clear that the two sides were willing to normalize official relations. But there were other historical issues that could not be swept under the carpet with the rhetoric. There is hope from Pakistan that Bangladesh would like to see some apologies and recognition of 1971. The issue of an apology is still delicate and untouched during Ishaq Dar's visit to Dhaka, reports said. Thus, the shift in rhetoric would be interpreted as a de-escalation, and not a true reconciliation. Bangladesh is ready to deal with Pakistan pragmatically, without totally forgetting its history.

Overall, a more diplomatic and economic tone has facilitated more cooperative diplomatic and economic relations. The political cost of contact was minimised; both governments could use positive rhetoric, and discussion

of practical areas such as trade, travel, education, culture, and connection was promoted. This rhetorical twist proved essential as it was only with it that one could expect formal diplomatic mending to be more than a veneer.

Institutional Mechanisms for Cooperation

The sustainability of the improvements will be conditional on institutional procedures and individual meetings after the year 2024. The most important institutional evolution was the Foreign Secretary-Level Bilateral Consultations (Round 6) as a diplomatic reset and as a formal platform for the two sides to talk about all aspects of bilateral issues. The consultation program was wide-ranging. It spanned political relations, trade and investment, agriculture, education, cultural cooperation, cooperation in the field of defence, connectivity and cooperation in the international fora and regional organisations. The breadth of issues indicates that Pakistan was not just limited to symbolic gestures in the relationship with Bangladesh. Instead, they sought practical ways to deepen cooperation step by step. And there was also room for fresh engagement in multilateral fora. Discussions on the UN, D-8, OIC, and SAARC provided an opportunity for Pakistani and Bangladeshi leaders to interact without the pressures of bilateral visits. Multilateral platforms helped pave the way for the normalisation of engagement at the leadership level, as shown in the UNGA sessions in New York and the D-8 meeting in Cairo. The platforms are important in that they reduce the political sensitivity and enable the two countries to discuss cooperation from a broader regional or international perspective.

This was particularly the case with the D-8 platform, as Pakistan and Bangladesh are members of the Developing-8 group of Muslim-majority countries. The meeting on the fringes of the 11th D-8 Summit in Cairo in December 2024 helped the two sides frame partnership in terms of development, commerce, and common economic interests, rather than historical tensions (Sajid, 2024). Also, the OIC offers a diplomatic venue for Pakistan and Bangladesh to work on matters relating to the Muslim world, while keeping bilateral lines of contact open. Visa facilitation was also entrenched under the collaboration framework. The 2025 mutual visa waiver for holders of diplomatic and official passports has eliminated procedural hurdles to official engagement. These might sound like technical arrangements, but they are important for keeping diplomatic engagement going, which depends on regular official travel.

Efforts to resolve old complaints were tentative. Difficult issues like apology, stranded Pakistanis/Biharis, division of assets, or the meaning of 1971 were not adequately addressed on either side. Diplomacy after 2024, however, showed that there was a move to unlink practical cooperation from historical conflicts that have not been resolved. But this does not mean that previous problems came to an end. Instead, both sides appeared to be proceeding slowly, and the first step was to improve communication and cooperation, and the more delicate issues were to be discussed later in diplomatic fashion. There are advantages and disadvantages to this approach. The good news is that it does not derail cooperation in trade, travel, culture, and regional forums completely because of historical issues. The disadvantage is that if there are unresolved grievances, then they are likely to resurface when domestic politics starts to become increasingly polarized. Thus, institutional arrangements will only be able to facilitate interaction if diplomatic language is used with care, historical sensitivity is promoted, and political commitment is maintained.

In this context, the institutional rebirth in post-2024 supports the argument that the PAK-BGD relations started their period of pragmatic recalibration. The relationship is becoming more structured – consultations at secretary of state level recommence, high-level meetings, visa facilitation, and multilateral involvement. However, as long as there are a lot of things to be solved and the political transition is not complete in Bangladesh, it's too early to conclude the improvement is permanent.

Economic Relations after 2024

The 2024 political change marked one of the most tangible areas of collaboration between Pakistan and Bangladesh: economic relations. Unlike historical concerns that remain politically sensitive, economic cooperation provides a less controversial setting for the two countries to establish confidence. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan are huge Muslim-majority South Asian states with large consumer markets, textile industries, agricultural sectors, and expanding service economies. Despite such potential, the bilateral economic relationship between the two countries has traditionally been limited due to political hostility, poor connectivity, lack of direct shipping, visa restrictions, and lack of persistent institutional participation. The period after 2024 provided a more conducive environment for economic activity. Bangladesh's interim government was more amenable to regional cooperation diversification, while for Pakistan, the thaw in Bangladesh-Pakistan ties was an opportunity to restore economic linkages in South Asia. The economic engagement can also be seen from a neorealist perspective, where Bangladesh is trying to gain strategic autonomy through developing alliances beyond India. Closer economic ties with Bangladesh can help reduce Pakistan's regional isolation and create new commercial opportunities. So, the economic aspect of the post-2024 ties is vital not only for trade but also for wider regional diplomacy.

Trade and Investment

For decades, bilateral commerce between Pakistan and Bangladesh has stayed below its potential. The two countries have complementary economic sectors, but the political distance and insufficient institutional backing have prevented commerce from increasing greatly. Pakistan's exports largely include cotton, yarn, textiles, chemicals, leather products, machinery and agricultural items. Bangladesh has the scope to export jute products, garments, pharmaceuticals, leather goods and processed foods to Pakistan. Nevertheless, the commercial relationship continues to be heavily skewed in favour of Pakistan.

According to figures reported by the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan, Pakistan exported goods worth around US\$661 million to Bangladesh in FY2023-24, while imports from Bangladesh were only around US\$57 million. This means that the total recorded trade was approximately US\$718 million, but Bangladesh's share in exports to Pakistan was very small (Khan 2025). This imbalance shows that although Pakistan already has a reasonable export presence in the Bangladeshi market, Bangladesh has not yet been able to use Pakistan as a significant export destination. More recent trade data also indicates Pakistan's stronger export position. UN COMTRADE-based data reported by Trading Economics shows that Pakistan's exports to Bangladesh reached approximately US\$731.47 million in 2025 (Trading Economics, 2026). On the other side, data compiled by the Observatory of Economic Complexity shows that Bangladesh exported around US\$46 million to Pakistan in 2024, with jute and other textile fibres forming one of the main export categories (OEC, 2026). Although data sources may vary slightly because of differences in reporting methods, all available figures confirm the same pattern: bilateral trade is limited, and Bangladesh's exports to Pakistan remain much smaller than Pakistan's exports to Bangladesh.

The trade deficit matters a lot since there must be some advantage to both parties for a lasting economic alliance. If the relationship continues one-sided, there may not be sufficient economic reasons for Bangladesh to increase trade with Pakistan. Thus, post-2024 economic cooperation should not only focus on expanding Pakistan's exports but also on providing market access to Bangladeshi products. Bangladesh has globally competitive sectors, especially ready-made garments, knitwear, jute products, leather goods, pharmaceuticals, and IT services. If these sectors gain better access to Pakistan's market, the economic relationship can become more balanced and politically acceptable in Bangladesh. The post-transition period showed signs of renewed trade ambition. Pakistan and Bangladesh in August 2025 initiated steps for the establishment of a Joint Working Group on Trade. The mechanism was to design a plan

to increase commerce and investment between the two countries. Reports indicated that both sides aimed to raise bilateral trade to around US\$1 billion in the financial year beginning in July 2025 (Shabbir, 2025). The importance of this target is that it demonstrated that both states were no longer considering trade as a 'marginal' issue. Rather, for them, it was about institutionalizing it and putting a direction on it.

It was also important for the Joint Economic Commission to be reactivated. In August 2025, the Ministry of Commerce announced that the two sides have agreed to resume the Joint Economic Commission forum, as a basis for drawing up a comprehensive plan for trade, investment and economic cooperation (PID, 2025). This is important because business doesn't operate in a fog. Coordination, facilitation of commerce, dispute settlement, and regular monitoring of economic cooperation are needed as the next step in the process, all of which will be done at the bureaucratic level. Organisations like the Joint Working Group and the Joint Economic Commission can help bring about the economic relations from the symbolic declarations into action. There remains a tremendous potential and opportunity for investment cooperation, and it is still maturing. Pakistan and Bangladesh have an opportunity to invest in the textile industry, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, food processing, leather, logistics, education, and information technology. Bangladesh is a competitive player in the garment industry, and Pakistan is competitive in the fields of cotton, yarn, textiles, sports goods, surgical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and foodstuffs. Cooperation in the value chain, particularly in the textile and clothing industry, can contribute to the benefit of both economies. For instance, Pakistan could supply raw materials like cotton and yarn, and Bangladesh could take advantage of its manufacturing and export capabilities in the garment industry. This cooperation may bring both countries to a stage of production-related economic engagement other than import-export trade.

Political uncertainty and restricted financial channels, however, restrict investment flows, as do limited B2B networks and operators in the private sector lacking awareness. Historically, opportunities for business communities to interact directly are fewer in both countries. Thus, if there is any improvement after 2024, it should be supported by the participation of trade fairs, the chambers of commerce, investment forums, and simpler visa procedures for businesspeople. If diplomatic goodwill is followed by both countries in the field of trade, connectivity, and people-to-people relationships, then PAK-BGD relations will be relevant. Overall, there are some positive signs of progress in trade and investment beyond 2024, although they are still emerging. The figures show that it is not a non-existent trading base, but rather a small but not unimportant one. The challenge is to expand trade volume, diminish trade imbalances, diversify trade commodities, and put in place institutional arrangements for long-term economic cooperation.

Connectivity and Market Access

Connectivity is amongst the most important concerns for PAK-BGD commercial ties. For many years, the absence of direct shipping and limited air links increased expenses, slowed the transfer of freight, and discouraged traders. On many occasions, goods have to pass through foreign countries or indirect routes, which increases the time and transaction costs. The greater connectivity after 2024 was therefore an important step for practical economic cooperation.

A key milestone was reached in November 2024 when the first direct cargo ship from Karachi docked at the Chittagong Port. The vessel carried commodities with a capacity of about 2,300 TEUs and is said to be the first direct maritime link between Pakistan and Bangladesh (Prothom Alo, Cargo vessel from Karachi arrives at Chittagong port for first time, 2024). Besides, it was not simply a business development, but a diplomatic signal. The direct route was designed to lessen reliance on all indirect routes, and it represented the willingness of the two countries to remove the de facto constraints on trade. The proposed direct road traffic connection between Karachi

and Chittagong will reduce the transit time and streamline the supply chains. Trade can be more predictable and desirable if there is a direct maritime route. This is particularly so for industries like textiles, chemicals, agricultural products, food products, and industrial inputs, where the delivery time and freight cost are critical for competitiveness.

The corridor is also playing a crucial role in the export sector of the country of Bangladesh. Pakistan offered Bangladesh the use of Karachi Port for trade linkages, providing access to China and Central Asian markets. Bangladesh might increase exports of ready-made clothes, knitwear, leather and footwear, agro-processed products and IT services with a direct shipping route via Karachi, reports from Bangladesh said (Saif, 2025). This means that it is not only a matter of Pakistan selling more to Bangladesh, but Bangladesh can also tap into a bigger market in Pakistan as well. Visa facilitation and business mobility are also a factor in market access. Simplify travel for business persons, investors, students and officials to build trust and explore possibilities. As a result of this agreement, Pakistan and Bangladesh signed the visa exemption for diplomatic and official passports in August 2025. Various memoranda of understanding were signed with regard to trade, media, foreign service training, and strategic studies and cultural cooperation (Prothom Alo, 2025). The deal only applied to official and diplomatic passports, but was a precursor to easing travel restrictions. Business visa facilitation, in the long run, would be needed to improve economic cooperation.

There was also a wider economic link, with educational and professional connections. The PAK-BGD Knowledge Corridor (PAK-BGD-KC) was launched in August 2025 when Ishaq Dar was in Dhaka, Pakistan. This project was to be implemented by the Pakistan government for 500 scholarships to be awarded to students from Bangladesh for 5 years, some of which were to be for medical studies (Radio Pakistan, 2025). It is an education programme in the first place, but with an economic dimension too: the mobility of students, the development of trade and investment through the strengthening of professional training and academic cooperation are seen as a basis for establishing long-lasting "people-to-people" links. There's a regional aspect to connectivity as well. Bangladesh has a coastline on the Bay of Bengal while Pakistan has a coastline on Arabian Sea and potential access to West Asia, Central Asia, and China. Enhanced connectivity links between Pakistan and Bangladesh could thus enhance the commerce opportunities in the region. But this co-operation would have to be based on safe diplomatic relations, efficient customs clearance processes, better banking systems and political trust.

However, a number of limitations remain that are hindering market entry. There have yet to be any direct financial ties, little knowledge about each other's markets, tariff and non-tariff barriers, weak logistics networks, and political prudence. Even exports to Pakistan have been very low from Bangladesh; thus, it is not sufficient to rely on direct shipping. This should be supported by trade promotion, product diversification, business delegation exchanges, and regulatory facilitation. As a result, one of the concrete measures that came up as an indicator of strengthening ties was connectivity beyond 2024. Both countries are beginning to deal with the infrastructure barriers in the first direct cargo ship and discussions of commercial lines from Karachi. However, their success will depend on their routine, commercial viability, and broader institutional cooperation.

Strategic and Security Cooperation

After 2024, strategic and security collaboration between Pakistan and Bangladesh remained more cautious than diplomatic and economic engagement. Unlike economic or official consultations, defense cooperation is politically problematic because of the 1971 legacy, India's regional role and Bangladesh's wish not to get sucked into Pakistan-India competition. However, the post-2024 period saw fresh signals of security discourse, defense exchanges and collaboration on non-traditional security concerns such as counterterrorism, narcotics control, police training and

cybercrime. The strategic dimension of PAK-BGD relations, thus, needs to be seen as both restricted and increasing. It is not yet a formal alliance or a full defense collaboration. Rather, it signals careful engagement in areas where both governments can work without publicly contesting Bangladesh's larger regional equilibrium. From a neorealist perspective, such careful engagement is logical, as Bangladesh seeks greater strategic autonomy without undue confrontation with India. Pakistan, for its part, sees closer ties with Bangladesh as a means to expand its diplomatic space in the area and to minimize its South Asian isolation.

Contacts and Exchanges with Defence

After the fall of the Hasina government, defence contacts between Pakistan and Bangladesh strengthened. The meetings were important because there had been little military-to-military engagement in recent years. Under the Awami League, defence engagement with Pakistan was politically sensitive because of the memory of 1971 and Bangladesh's close security relationship with India. From 2024, the temporary government seemed more inclined to limited and gradual defence involvement.

A key step was the inclusion of defence cooperation in the Sixth Round of Foreign Secretary-Level Bilateral Consultations at Dhaka on 17 April 2025. The talks, which were held after a lapse of 15 years, covered political ties, trade, investment, agriculture, education, cultural exchange, regional connectivity, multilateral collaboration and defence cooperation (Government of Pakistan, 2025). The inclusion of defence cooperation on the official agenda suggests both parties were prepared to address security in an official diplomatic environment. Military-level exchanges grew in 2025 as well. In August 2025, Bangladesh's Lieutenant General S. M. Faizur Rahman travelled to Pakistan and met Pakistan's Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza. The conference allegedly explored measures to further defence cooperation, and the Bangladeshi official lauded the professionalism of Pakistan's armed services and Pakistan's sacrifices in counterterrorism (Arab News Pakistan, 2025). This was essential because such wording was indicative of a more positive military-to-military tone than in years past.

In October 2025, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of the Pakistan Army, visited Dhaka to engage in discussions with the civilian and military leadership of the country. The meeting included talks on cooperation in the fields of defence and security, and it was seen as a step in the process of improving bilateral relations (Arab News, 2025). Such mutual visits are vital as defence co-operation takes time to build confidence. Rounds and rounding may eventually develop avenues of possible future collaboration, even if no treaty of mutual defense is established immediately. In early 2026, on the defense side of things, it appeared it was progressing from general to specific discussions. In January 2026, Pakistan and Bangladesh were in discussions regarding a defense pact that would include the sale of JF-17 Thunder fighter jets, a speedy transfer of Super Mushshak trainer aircraft, training plans, and extended maintenance agreements (Sayeed, 2026). This would represent a major change if it comes to fruition, as military procurement creates long-term technological, training, and institutional ties among militaries. But these defence contacts need to be scrutinised. There is no military cooperation between Bangladesh and Pakistan. The balance of India-China and other partners with the concept of strategic autonomy remains the guiding mantra in its defence policy. Hence, the defence interaction with Pakistan after 2024 should be viewed as a 'soft meet', as opposed to a 'hard meet' of a strategic nature. The logic was not that there was an alliance, but that the subject of defence cooperation could be raised once again after years of side-stepping it.

Maritime and Regional Security

Additionally, maritime and regional security issues are also connected with the PAK-BGD post-2024 relations. Bangladesh is located in the Bay of Bengal. The state of Pakistan is located on the Arabian Sea. The two countries

have no land frontier, but have important maritime interests such as trade, ports, sea lanes and regional connectivity. In November 2024, the first direct freight ship between Karachi and Chittagong indicated a potential path for cooperation between the two states, which could be marine connectivity (Xinhua, 2026). The direct sea connection is not only of economic value, but also of strategic value. Ports and shipping routes in South Asia are not just economic resources, but also associated with regional influence, logistic accessibility and strategic linkages. Direct shipping reduces reliance on third-country channels and establishes a direct link between Pakistan's access to the Arabian Sea and Bangladesh's position on the Bay of Bengal. This is not to suggest that Pakistan and Bangladesh are forming a maritime security bloc, but it does indicate that connectivity can facilitate wider regional engagement.

Ports, maritime boundary, oil interests and location linking South Asia to Southeast Asia have made Bangladesh more prominent in the Bay of Bengal. Pakistan's desire to improve marine and trade relations with Bangladesh has to be seen in this wider context. For Bangladesh, cooperation with Pakistan may dovetail with its policy of diversifying its connectivity options. For Pakistan, maritime connectivity with Bangladesh can help re-open commercial and political links in eastern South Asia. But maritime cooperation will certainly remain limited by geography and regional politics. India is the principal regional actor between Pakistan and Bangladesh and New Delhi constantly monitors any closer ties between Pakistan and Bangladesh. Moreover, Bangladesh is already involved in a range of debates on the Bay of Bengal and Indo-Pacific where India, China, the United States and other states have interests. Hence, maritime cooperation with Pakistan is apt to stay confined to trade, logistics and port connections, rather than cooperative naval activity or official maritime security arrangements. In this sense, maritime cooperation post-2024 represents a low-risk area of participation. It allows both countries to enhance connectivity without resorting to sensitive military collaboration. If direct shipping becomes frequent and commercially successful, it can enhance the commerce, cut transport costs, and inspire trust for further cooperation.

Intelligence, Counter-Terror and Police Co-operation

Among the most pragmatic avenues of PAK-BGD collaboration post 2024 was non-traditional security cooperation. The two countries are challenged in terms of terrorism, narcotics, cybercrime, illegal networks, and policing. They create a space where co-operation can be presented in technical and administrative rather than ideological or historical terms.

In July 2025, Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited Dhaka and had talks with Adviser to the Prime Minister on Home Affairs of Bangladesh, Lt Gen (Retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury. Both sides discussed cooperation against narcotics and terrorism, police training, cybercrime, the Rohingya issue, visa facilitation, and growing trade and commerce (Daily Star, 2025). The significance of the conference was that it tied internal security cooperation to the broader bilateral normalisation. The July 2025 summit also touched on cooperation between police academies. The police of Pakistan offered training opportunities to the officials of Bangladesh, and a joint committee was said to have been constituted to promote collaboration. These developments suggested that the two countries were striving to construct realistic security channels below the level of high politics. Police training and cooperation on cybercrime are less politically problematic than military partnerships and can thus function as confidence-building measures.

Counterterrorism cooperation is especially important as Pakistan has a long history of coping with militant violence and Bangladesh has had its own security challenges at home. Cooperation in this area could include training, information exchange, police modernization, monitoring of cybercrime and narcotics control. But intelligence coordination remains delicate. Bangladesh would be careful not to give any impression that cooperation with Pakistan is geared against India. Public collaboration is therefore likely to be on terrorism, narcotics, policing and

cybercrime rather than explicit intelligence coordination. The Rohingya issue was also discussed during the July 2025 talks. While Pakistan is not a direct actor in the Rohingya crisis as Bangladesh or Myanmar is, the problem opens space for collaboration in humanitarian diplomacy and Muslim-world forums. Pakistan could assist Bangladesh in the OIC and other forums to raise the issue of Rohingya. The cooperation will likely have only a partial impact on resolving the situation, but it will aid in improving diplomatic coordination between the two countries in a more diplomatic manner. Security cooperation in general is on the fence, but it is visible after 2024. There are defense exchanges and police training talks and collaboration on counterterrorism and cybercrime – all indications that the strategic engagement is not confined to official diplomacy. However, it remains constrained by historic memory and India's concerns and political dynamics regarding its own transition in Bangladesh. It is most likely that technological cooperation will be allowed to develop slowly, not that they will rush to join a defence pact.

Regional and External Factors

The future of PAK-BGD relations after 2024 cannot be a matter of just bilateralism. They are much influenced by regional and foreign forces, particularly the role of India, the increasing importance of China, the interests of the United States and platforms like the OIC, D-8, and SAARC. Bangladesh's 2024 shift produced a new regional dynamic, weakening a government that had maintained close ties with India and opening space for Dhaka to diversify its external connections. From a neorealist perspective, the post-2024 change reflects the conduct of a smaller state seeking to enhance its strategic autonomy in a competitive regional environment. Bangladesh is not powerful enough to control the regional system but it can enhance its negotiating position by involving multiple actors. This is why Pakistan's outreach has been revived. Islamabad is seeking to extend its diplomatic choices in South Asia and decrease the effects of regional isolation.

India's Role and Limitations

India continues to be the most important external force in PAK-BGD ties. Bangladesh shares a 4,000-kilometre-plus land border with India and geography is a permanent issue in Dhaka's foreign policy (The Express Tribune, 2026). India also enjoys good relations with Bangladesh in terms of trade, water, migration, energy, border control, transit, and security. As a result, no Bangladeshi government can afford to ignore India, even if it is keen to diversify its regional partnerships. During the tenure of Sheikh Hasina, India and Bangladesh had hailed their relations as a "golden era" of collaboration in security, connectivity, trade and counterterrorism. India viewed Hasina as a credible partner as her government moved to resolve several of New Delhi's security issues, mainly related to anti-India militant organisations and connectivity to India's northeast. The fall of Hasina in August 2024 was a huge obstacle for India's Bangladesh strategy. International Crisis Group contends that Hasina's fall was a colossal defeat for India, her biggest external supporter throughout her fifteen-year leadership (International Crisis Group , 2025).

The political atmosphere in Bangladesh turned more critical of India after 2024. For many Bangladeshis, India was too strongly identified with the Hasina regime. Hasina's presence in India following her collapse further strained bilateral relations. Rising India-Bangladesh tensions were further fuelled by extradition requests, border management, minority issues and political pronouncements. The Guardian reported that India was considering Bangladesh's request to extradite Hasina after Dhaka reiterated it following legal action against her (The Guardian, 2024). Such factors suggest that the Bangladesh-India relations grew more politically sensitive after the transition. India's role is both an opportunity and a limitation for PAK-BGD ties. The possibility is that Dhaka's aim to avoid overdependence on India can make interaction with Pakistan more palatable. Better relations with Pakistan provide Bangladesh the opportunity to demonstrate it has other regional options. The caveat is that Bangladesh cannot afford

to be on bad terms with India. Geography and economic interdependence dictate that Dhaka must be cautious on ties with Pakistan, and avoid the impression that it is joining an anti-India coalition.

This suggests that relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh are expected to strengthen gradually. Diplomatic, commercial, educational, cultural and limited security cooperation may increase, but Bangladesh will avoid actions that could cause a harsh Indian backlash. So India is both an enabler of Bangladesh's diversification and a constraint on how far it can go in improving relations with Pakistan.

China, the United States and the Islamic World

Another major component in the post-2024 regional scenario is China. Bangladesh maintains close economic relations with China in the areas of infrastructure, trade, defence equipment and development funding. During a visit to China in 2025 by Muhammad Yunus, President Xi Jinping agreed to consider reducing the interest rate on loans from China, encouraged Chinese investment in Bangladesh, and discussed factory relocation and cooperation on water resources (Reuters, Bangladesh says Xi Jinping would consider lowering interest on Chinese loans, 2025). This suggests that China continued to be a crucial external partner of Bangladesh's foreign policy. The significance of PAK-BGD relations for China is because Pakistan and China are close strategic partners. If Bangladesh deepens its ties with both China and Pakistan simultaneously, India may perceive this as a shift in the regional balance. But Bangladesh is not expected to formally join a China-Pakistan axis. It is more likely to hedge, to preserve links with India, to increase economic cooperation with China, to improve relations with Pakistan and to engage western actors.

The USA also matters. Western interest in Bangladesh's political transition was driven by worries about democracy, human rights, labour conditions and Indo-Pacific strategy. Washington has an interest in the democratic stability of Bangladesh and its position in the Bay of Bengal. For Dhaka, relations with the United States and Europe are crucial as Bangladesh's garment exports are highly dependent on Western markets. So Bangladesh cannot have a foreign policy based just on India, China, or Pakistan. It must be responsive also to western economic and diplomatic demands.

The Muslim world is another forum for PAK-BGD diplomatic relations. Pakistan and Bangladesh are both Muslim majority states and members of OIC and D-8. These meetings enable both countries to work on problems including Palestine, Islamophobia, development cooperation, and the Rohingya catastrophe. The D-8 Summit in Cairo in December 2024 was a significant platform for advancing bilateral ties between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus. Such platforms reduce political sensitivity, as participation occurs within a more multinational framework (Sajid, 2024).

The Muslim-world aspect can perhaps offer Pakistan and Bangladesh a comparable diplomatic alternative. But religion alone cannot obviate the past and strategic restraint. While they share an Islamic identity, Bangladesh and Pakistan are very different in national history, security interests, and regional priorities. The extent of cooperation through the OIC and D-8 does not compensate for all bilateral confidence-building measures.

Challenges and Limitations

There are a few hurdles in the path to hinder PAK-BGD ties but significant advancements have taken place after 2024.

- ▶ The most important issue is the 1971 legacy. This is related to the history of the Liberation war. A government in Dhaka would definitely take into serious consideration the domestic perspective of the Pakistani economy.

On the other hand, foreign policy and trade relation, criticism from domestic forums of any improved relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan would not show a bygone grievance.

- ▶ The second issue is the flawed reconciliation. Despite diplomatic recognition having been extended several decades ago, moral and political healing has yet to take place. Trust remains tainted as issues like apology, stranded Pakistanis/Biharis, asset sharing and the meaning of the 1971 events have yet to be addressed. Zahid (2025) describes this condition as "recognition without reconciliation", signifying how the formal diplomatic ties do not overlap with the more profound negotiations for political reconciliation.
- ▶ The third challenge is Bangladesh's own political instability. The immediate post-2024 period has already begun with an interim government. A subsequent democratically elected government would have different priorities. If the Awami League or another political ideology more sympathetic to India returns to power, the speed of interaction with Pakistan is likely to slow down. Even with other parties in power, it is a difficult line to walk.
- ▶ The fourth is India. Given geography and interdependence, Bangladesh cannot afford to disregard India's concerns. India, the only country sharing a border on three sides with Bangladesh, continues to play a key role in the administration of borders, energy, trade, water, and security. India could consider the fast growth of PAK-BGD relations as a strategic challenge. This restricts the structural choices available to Dhaka vis-à-vis Islamabad.
- ▶ The sixth obstacle is a poor economic base. Trading has potential, but the current trading relationship is restricted and unequal. Pakistan's exports to Bangladesh are far greater than Bangladesh's exports to Pakistan. If a Bangladeshi company does not have true market access in Pakistan, economic cooperation could be seen as one-sided. For sustainable connections, political goodwill is not enough; there must be mutual advantages.
- ▶ Institutional Weakness: The sixth obstacle is institutional weakness. It is good that consultations and economic procedures are being revived. But such mechanisms must be regular and successful. Gaps between word and deed are typically the bane of South Asian diplomacy. Working groups, commissions and consultations need to meet often, or the momentum may be lost.
- ▶ Seventhly is regional competition including China, India and the United States. The geopolitics of Bangladesh are quite important to other stakeholders this could be an issue for India and some in the West if Pakistan-Bangladesh ties could be seen as part of the China-Pakistan axis. Thus, Dhaka will need to manage this issue wisely to steer away from camp politics.
- ▶ The eighth challenge is that of public opinion. Government-to-government relations may develop rapidly; public trust changes slowly. Decades of bad narratives, historic memory and restricted people-to-people contact have produced psychological estrangement. To create long-term societal support for better ties, it is vital to use cultural exchanges, educational cooperation, sports, media participation and academic discourse.

So the limits are severe. PAK-BGD ties after 2024 are better but still tenuous. The partnership will be lasting if both governments institutionalise collaboration, deal carefully with historical difficulties, preserve economic balance, and prevent the alliance from developing into an anti-India alignment.

Conclusion

Overall, this article explored PAK-BGD ties in the aftermath of Bangladesh's 2024 political shift. It suggested that the fall of Sheikh Hasina and the emergence of the interim government under Yunus ushered in a new diplomatic atmosphere. The resumption of high-level engagement, foreign secretary-level meetings after 15 years, ministerial visits, visa facilitation, and warmer political rhetoric are all indicative of an improvement in diplomatic relations. The economic component also made concrete strides. Bilateral trade remained constrained and skewed, but both

countries initiated talks to boost trade, increase connectivity, restore economic institutions and promote market access. The first direct Karachi-Chittagong link for commodities was especially important in reducing the effective distance between the two countries and expressed a new wish to cooperate. Strategic cooperation was tentative, but there. The defence contacts, police training talks, counterterrorism conversations, and potential defence purchases indicated a relationship expanding beyond symbolic diplomacy. Bangladesh didn't formally join Pakistan, however, because of India's role, historical memory, and its own strategic autonomy.

To summarize, the recent gains in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations post-2024 seem to be more a case of a practical reset rather than a strategic overhaul. In Bangladesh, the political change opened room for talks with Pakistan. Still, what happens next will hinge on whether both sides turn what they have started into rules and routines. Several steps could help sustain momentum. For example, more regular meetings at senior levels would matter. Better trade systems, smoother transport links, and easier financial connections. Student and educational exchanges can also build familiarity. In addition, ongoing security talks should continue. At the same time, several issues remain unresolved. Old grievances have not fully gone away. Trade between the two countries remains unbalanced. Bangladesh also faces internal political uncertainty. But India still plays a strong role in the region that can influence choices behind the curtain. Because of these limits, the relationship may not last just because leaders feel friendly for a short time. The bigger question is whether the two governments can lock in the current momentum. They would need stable institutions, deals that benefit both sides, and regular contact between ordinary people. If the current phase carries forward beyond the interim political period, Pakistan-Bangladesh ties could become more practical and steadier. They may develop into a more functional partnership. That does not have to mean a formal strategic alliance.

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