

# Issue Brief

February 2026  
No : 487

India's Security  
Calculus Amidst  
Bangladesh's Insecurity  
&  
Renewed  
Military Ambitions

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# *India's Security Calculus Amidst Bangladesh's Insecurity and Renewed Military Ambitions*

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## **Abstract**

India faces its greatest strategic challenge from Bangladesh's recent geo-political shifts since the 1971 Liberation War (Hindustan Times, 2025). The August 2024 political upheaval in Dhaka that displaced Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (Rizve, S. 2025), has catalysed a complex security environment characterised by ongoing military modernisation, diversified international partnerships and weakening India - Bangladesh ties that demands urgent strategic recalibration from New Delhi. The incumbent Bangladesh elections in February 2026, provides a fleeting timeframe to shape the strategic drift in India's eastern neighbourhood.

**Keywords:** India-Bangladesh instability, China-Turkiye-Pakistan Triad, Regional Stability, Redefining Boundaries

## **Introduction**

Bangladesh, once a stable partner aligned with India, is emerging as a far more autonomous and strategically diversified actor in recent times. The August 2024 political upheaval (Rizve, S. 2025), which ended Sheikh Hasina's long tenure, has shattered the assumptions behind India - Bangladesh cooperation over a decade. Bangladesh is now pursuing ambitious military modernisation and deepening defence ties with China, Turkiye and Pakistan. In this geo-political flux, India is confronting a complex security challenge—arguably its greatest in the region since 1971 (Hindustan Times, 2025). With the scheduled Bangladesh election in February 2026 and the expiration of Ganga Water Sharing Treaty in the same year, 2026 affords India a narrow window of opportunity to shape the strategic security calculus in India's eastern neighbourhood. This article aims to examine Bangladesh's evolving military posture and international partnerships, explores the implications for India's security and suggests how India must adapt its strategy.

## **Bangladesh's Military Modernisation**

### **Forces Goal 2030**

Bangladesh's Forces Goal 2030 (Mahboob, I.H. 2023) represents its most ambitious military expansion. The defence budget in FY 2025-26 stands at Tk 40,698 crore (US\$ 3.3 bn) {The Business Standard, 2025} with roughly 93% for operations and maintenance, and a marginal 2.4% for new procurement, reflecting fiscal constraints (The Business Standard, 2025). The plan calls for comprehensive upgrades with more mechanised formations in Army, blue water capable Navy (Mahboob, I.H. 2023) and a transformed Air Force with 96 fighters by 2040, supported by Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) with advanced integrated air defence systems (BDMilitary, 2025).

### **Ground Force Modernisation**

The Bangladesh Army has acquired 44 VT-5 light tanks from China and 44 MBT-2000 Main Battle Tanks as the core of its armoured fleet. These are complemented by Russian BTR-80 Armoured Personnel Carriers, Turkish Otokar Cobra/ Cobra II Light Armoured Vehicles and TRG-300 Tiger Medium Range Rocket Systems (MLRS). The army has also inducted advanced Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGM), air defence systems and tactical surveillance assets, including six Bayraktar TB2 MALE UAVs for reconnaissance and strike missions. However, the existing military formations lack advanced networking and integration with broader joint operations architecture. Anti-aircraft defences remain fragmented across older FM-90 SHORAD systems and ongoing procurement of Turkish HISAR O+, thus creating interoperability challenges. Artillery modernisation is ongoing but incomplete, with cyber warfare capabilities and Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) readiness requiring substantial development.

### **Naval Force Structure**

The Bangladesh Navy has shifted its focus from a coastal force to a combat-capable Blue Water Force. Its fleet comprises two Chinese Type 035G submarines, two Type 053H3 guided missile frigates and two Type 056 corvettes. Naval aviation capabilities have been enhanced with four Dornier 228 Maritime Patrol Aircraft and four Augusta Westland helicopters for Anti-Submarine Warfare and transport. In 2023, it inaugurated the new Sher-e-Bangla naval base (with submarine berths at Pekua). Bangladesh has developed its own tactical data link

(Bangla-22) {BDMilitary, 2025}, thus indicating a push for operational autonomy with less reliance on foreign networks.

### ***Air Force Expansion***

The Bangladesh Air Force aims to expand from its 70-80 combat jets to 96 multi-role fighters by 2040 (BDMilitary, 2025), accompanied by new Electronic Warfare and Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) capabilities. The current inventory includes 12 Russian Yak-130 advanced trainers, 35 Chinese Chengdu F-7BG light attack fighters and eight Russian MiG-29 fighters, along with various Chinese and Russian air defence radars. Further, there is a pursuant interest in Turkish ATAK choppers and ANKA drones (News Arena Network, 2026). The Air Force 2040 modernisation blueprint envisions expansion to 60,000 personnel with an US \$ 8 bn budget (BDMilitary, 2025), multi-platform force projection capability, integrated air defence systems spanning short range, medium range (HISAR O+) and long range (SIPER) systems (Ahmed, K. 2025), distributed FOBs, aerial refueling and strategic airlift capabilities (Rahman, M.Z. 2025).

### **Strategic Partnership Diversification and the Great Power Competition**

#### ***China as the Foundational Supplier***

China is a major defence supplier of Bangladesh and supplies around 80% of its military equipment (Bhaduria, R.P.S. 2025) including fighter jets, Main Battle Tanks (MBT), missile systems, naval vessels and submarines. China has also invested in Bangladesh's defence industry through joint ventures. A US\$1.3 bn China backed 'Defence Economic Zone' (Khosru, A.M. 2025) has been proposed to produce drones, cyber warfare systems and ammunition. China is also upgrading strategic infrastructure, such as expansion of Lalmonirhat airfield near India's Siliguri Corridor (Katoch, P.C. 2025), carrying dual-use military implications. The visit of Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh to Teesta project area near Siliguri Corridor on 19 January 2026 (Tasnim, A. 2026), reverberates the legitimacy of Indian concerns about its eastern flank. Further, the Chinese involvement in Bangladesh's ports of Chittagong and Mongla (Bose, S. 2025), extends its influence and provides greater access to Indian Ocean trade routes, especially for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) toward Kunming (Joshi, M. 2024).

### ***Turkiye's Emergence as a Strategic Partner***

Bangladesh has rapidly expanded defence ties with Turkiye. From 2021 to 2025, it became Turkiye's fourth largest arms buyer, importing around 15 categories of military equipment (Thakur, A. 2025), including Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs), short/long range air defence systems, MLRS, armoured vehicles and howitzers. These systems significantly enhance Bangladesh's military capabilities, thus complicating India's security calculus near the border, especially around the Siliguri Corridor. Turkey's NATO standard technology and training could gradually steer Bangladesh's military doctrine towards Western concepts, hence diminishing India's traditional familiarity advantage (Thakur, A. 2025). Turkish defence cooperation also carries ideological overtones of a pan-Islamic solidarity, which resonates with Bangladeshi nationalist movement. Moreover, Turkey's sovereign foreign policy means this budding relationship is resilient to outside pressure.

### ***Pakistan's Resurgent Military Engagement***

Since August 2024, Pakistan has capitalised on the opportunity to reinvigorate its defence ties with Bangladesh. There have been high-level exchanges of military leaders (Firstpost, 2025). Pakistan has offered Bangladesh the JF-17 Thunder fighter (a China - Pakistan co-developed platform) and Super Mushshak trainer aircraft, along with training and logistic support packages (Dawn, 2026). The JF-17 Block III variant carries advanced Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles and Electronic Warfare systems at relatively economical costs (Hussain, A. 2026). Prospective JF-17 purchases would align Bangladesh's Air Force with Pakistan and Chinese doctrines, thus further eroding India - Bangladesh integration. This outreach also serves as a political signal after its May 2025 clash with India, wherein Pakistan is marketing its pretentious combat confidence through arms diplomacy.

### ***Russia's Marginalised Position***

Russia's position as a defence supplier, has been substantially marginalised by the Chinese and Turkish alternatives. Further, Moscow's preoccupation with Ukraine, limits its bandwidth to compete for greater influence.

## Threat Assessment : Bangladesh as a Conduit for Regional Instability

### *The Myanmar Spillover Problem*

Though Bangladesh's military modernisation has often been framed as a response to India, however, instability in Myanmar remains its immediate threat. Incursion of 264 Myanmar Border Guard Police into Bangladesh territory (Fortify Rights, 2024) and large scale Arakan Army offensive in Rakhine State's Maungdaw in 2024 (The Irrawaddy, 2024), have underscored Bangladesh's porosity to Myanmar's internal volatility. Meanwhile, Myanmar's military junta remains hinged on China. China has invested over US\$ 113 mn in Myanmar since February 2021 coup (Gravers, M. 2023) and is involved in the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (Sin, K. 2024). This creates a double-edged challenge with increased refugee flows and weapons smuggling into Bangladesh, while China gains a stronger foothold. Moreover, buying Chinese arms to counter Myanmar's violence would eventually deepen the Chinese influence in Dhaka.

### *Internal Security Trajectory and Radicalisation Risk*

Bangladesh's domestic politics is in flux. The 2024 change of government (Rizve, S. 2025) and bans on major parties (Gaur, V. 2025) have fragmented the political landscape, thus empowering more nationalist and activist groups. The rise of the youth led National Citizen Party (Shivamurthy, A.G and Pramanik, M. 2025), reflects growing unrest. The risk of radicalisation is further aggravated with the rising unemployment among the youth in a country with extremely high population density. Historically, Bangladesh's inclination towards stricter Islamic nationalism (Biswas, S. 2025), have increased the infiltration across the India – Bangladesh border. Recent events reinforce these risks. Large anti-India rallies in Dhaka and attacks on Indian properties in 2025 (TOI, 2025), suggest that sentiment against India is now far easier to mobilise. In sum, Bangladesh's ideological trajectory now introduces new security uncertainties for India.

### *Economic Fragility*

Bangladesh's economic vulnerabilities continue to compound security risks, with inflation persistently hovering near 10% (Hasan, M.M. 2026). Historically, Bangladesh's economic distress directly correlates with its political instability (1975, 1990, 2006), which has created suitable conditions for exploitation by external actors (Rahman, J. 2021). A failing economy increases its susceptibility to both Chinese debt diplomacy as well as radicalisation.

## India's Geostrategic Vulnerabilities in the Bangladesh Context

### *The Siliguri Corridor: From Logistical Asset to Strategic Liability*

The Siliguri Corridor, the 22 km narrow strip in West Bengal, is India's only land bridge to its eight Northeast states (Kurmi, D. 2025), flanked by Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. However, Muhammad Yunus's rhetoric describing India's Northeast as "landlocked" (Roy, S. 2025), has elevated this bridge to India's core strategic concern. The proximity to the Chumbi Valley tri-junction (India - Bhutan - Tibet), further exacerbates this vulnerability, particularly with respect to Chinese boundary negotiations with Bhutan. Consequently, India has implemented a comprehensive security upgrade, including approx. 75% of the Siliguri Corridor's length featuring state of the art fencing (Singh, A. 2026) with Pan-Tilt-Zoom (PTZ) cameras. Since January 2025, the Border Security Force (BSF) has seized contraband worth Rs 8.5 crore, along with apprehension of a total of 440 Bangladeshis (touts and smugglers) {Singh, A. 2026}. However, Bangladesh controls the corridor's flanks (near Phansidewa, Panitanki and several river crossings). A hostile or indifferent Bangladeshi government could neglect these areas or even tacitly allow anti-India activity, which would threaten the corridor's security. Thus, the Siliguri Corridor remains India's geo-strategic vulnerability.

### *The Border Security Deterioration*

India's 4,096 km border with Bangladesh has been a cause of concern. In 2025, infiltration attempts surged to record levels (Jain, B. 2025), shifting from primarily economic migration to organised human trafficking, drug smuggling and possibly militant crossings. Reduced cooperation has degraded the warning and prevention capabilities. India's BSF traditionally uses non-lethal measures (detaining intruders) to avoid bilateral friction. However, this approach may be inadequate against coordinated networks. Further, the credibility of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has also been in question since August 2024 (Rizve, S. 2024). As a result, India now faces rising cross-border threats, when the usual cooperative mechanisms are fraying.

**Strategic Leverage Erosion and Marginalisation.** The fall of Sheikh Hasina has cost India its most reliable regional partner aside from Bhutan. Her government had institutionalised close defence cooperation with aligned strategic perspectives. The interim Bangladeshi leadership is more Islamist and less India-centric, and a new generation of Bangladeshi elites has little institutional memory of the old special relationship. At the same time, Dhaka is consciously diversifying its security partnerships, which appears to be a lasting realignment. In short, India's traditional strategic leverage in Bangladesh has eroded, and without significant policy changes, India would risk long term marginalisation in Dhaka's security calculus.

## Strategic Imperatives and Recommendations for India

Amidst the ongoing geopolitical churn and accelerated geo-strategic realignments, particularly in India's immediate neighbourhood, India's pursuit of development must be anchored in strategic autonomy. This would require calibrated diplomatic leverage and credible deterrence. India's approach must therefore combine hard security measures with institutionalised engagements. The following recommendations proposes a comprehensive framework to recalibrate India - Bangladesh relations for long term strategic resilience.

- **Border Security Imperatives**

- ***Border Security and Response Protocols.*** India should fully secure the Siliguri Corridor (100% real-time surveillance) and define clear Rules of Engagement for threats across the border. This includes well-defined thresholds for using force against large armed intrusions and ensuring rapid reinforcements. India should also establish secure hotlines and rapid incident response protocols to manage crises promptly.
- ***Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Cooperation.*** India should maintain a robust military to military counter-terrorism ties with Bangladesh. Further, the military initiatives and intelligence sharing should prioritise the shared threats such as insurgency, refugee issues, maritime piracy, etc., while insulating them from political fluctuations.
- ***Northeast Subnational Coordination.*** India's border states in the Northeast (Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram) should play an active policy role by setting up liaison cells in these states for direct engagements with Bangladeshi counterparts (military and civilian). Strengthening sub-national connections through trade, cultural exchanges, etc., would build local constituencies for stable India - Bangladesh relations that can endure beyond national political shifts.

- **Diplomatic and Economic Engagements**

- **Water Treaty Renewal and Broad Engagement.** India must renew the India - Bangladesh Ganga Water Treaty, that is expiring in 2026 (Saha, A.K. 2024), before February 2026 Bangladesh elections (The Hindu, 2026), while highlighting the mutual technical benefits. Simultaneously, India should expand bilateral engagement at all levels, including development aid (electricity projects, port upgrades, defence technology partnerships) that tie Bangladeshi interests to India and help counterbalance Chinese, Turkish and Pakistani influence.
- **Economic Resilience Support.** Indian support for Bangladesh's economic stability would be essential for regional security. In this context, India may consider extending a suitable credit line focused on infrastructure and energy projects.
- **Connectivity Projects.** India should pursue cross-border infrastructure with renewed vigour, such as the India - Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline and expanded rail/ road links. India can also frame them as part of a broader Indo-Pacific connectivity strategy (including Nepal, Bhutan, Southeast Asia) to bind Bangladesh economically into a wider regional network.
- **Engage Bangladesh's Emerging Leadership.** India should connect with Bangladesh's new generation of leaders, who have different priorities than the Hasina era. Expanding educational and training exchanges, more Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships and ITEC slots for Bangladeshi students, especially in military, diplomatic and policy fields, would generate familiarity and goodwill. India should also support Bangladesh's nascent defence industry through co-production and technology sharing to complement its defence self-reliance, while creating mutual strategic ties.

- **Strategic Defence Partnership**

- **Selective Defence Cooperation.** India should focus on where it has competitive advantages. India could offer submarine operation expertise and technology transfer, as an alternative to Chinese subs, co-develop drones within Bangladesh, and propose joint cyber defence and electronic warfare projects. Leveraging India's cost-effective technology and experience would make these offers attractive alternatives to Chinese or Turkish equipment.
- **Maritime Partnership.** Bangladesh's future security focus would likely be increasingly maritime. India should become Bangladesh's preferred partner in this realm, offering naval modernisation support and expanding regional Maritime Domain Awareness. India could also offer assistance in the deep-sea port development at Matarbari under Japanese partnership (Narasimha, A.S.L. 2025). Working together in BIMSTEC/ IORA frameworks on piracy, humanitarian assistance and maritime security would prioritise mutual security interests.
- **Exercise Diversification.** India should maintain and broaden military exercises with Bangladesh that addresses common challenges, including continued BSF–BGB counter-terror drills and introducing joint naval exercises on anti-piracy, disaster relief, navigation security, etc. Focusing these drills on non-India-centric threats would rebuild trust while assuring Bangladesh of its relevance.

- **Regional Integration**

- **Indo-Pacific Repositioning.** Finally, India should link Bangladesh to its broader Indo-Pacific vision by offering it greater participation in the expanded regional initiatives, such as QUAD Plus and joint technology projects. This framework may complement India's role as a credible partner of Bangladesh in the emerging regional order.

## Conclusion

India must recognize that Bangladesh is becoming a more independent and multipolar neighbor. India should abandon any assumptions of a guaranteed 'special relationship' and accept that Dhaka will diversify its security partnerships. In this context, the bilateral relationship must be built for resilience by convergence of multiple channels of institutional, military, economic and people-to-people connect.

The worst case scenario would be a Bangladesh estranged from India and aligned with Chinese or Pakistani interests. That outcome would fundamentally reshape regional security, jeopardize India's Northeast connectivity and undermine India's Indo-Pacific strategy. Avoiding this would require nuanced engagement, while respecting Bangladesh's legitimate interests and rising nationalism. India should focus on its military capabilities near borders, especially along the Siliguri Corridor, while keeping the two-way communication lines open at all times. The convergence of Bangladesh's February 2026 elections, expiration of Ganga Water Sharing Treaty and accelerating Chinese infrastructure projects creates a narrow strategic window for India.

India's adaptation to Bangladesh's new reality would mark its ability to sustain and thrive amidst the great power competition, which would shape the South Asian stability as also India's emergence as a responsible power in the Indo-Pacific.

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