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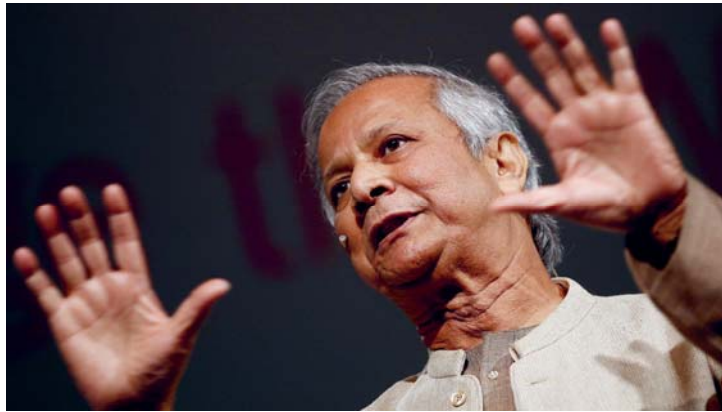
زبانهای اروپایی

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24.04.2025

## ***Dhaka's Diplomatic Drift: A Strategic Concern for India***

**Relations between India and Bangladesh have significantly shifted following the rise of a caretaker government in Dhaka led by Dr. Muhammad Yunus.**



As Bangladesh broadens its foreign policy horizons and strengthens ties with China, New Delhi recalibrates its regional strategy amid growing diplomatic tensions.

Relations between India and Bangladesh have taken a major shift since the establishment of a new caretaker government in Dhaka. India is taking a cautious approach towards Bangladesh. There have been no protracted negotiations between the Indian Prime Minister and the Bangladeshi Chief Advisor Dr. Muhammad Yunus since the latter took control of the interim setup in Dhaka. However, in April 2025, the two leaders held a brief meeting on the sidelines of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit in Thailand.

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Although India has ensured its support for the democratic process in Bangladesh, reports suggest that the Indian government is infuriated over the Bangladeshi government's account of this meeting and it claims that it is “politically motivated” and “mischievous”, demonstrating a tense diplomatic climate between the two sides. Hasina Wajid had long been regarded as New Delhi's most reliable regional ally. Dhaka showed an unprecedented tilt towards New Delhi during her tenure, making the regional dynamics quite predictable and favorable for India. However, her removal following the Monsoon Revolution and subsequent international condemnation impinged India's regional interests.

### **Bangladesh's Strategic Pivot: Strengthening Ties with China**

The interim government, under the leadership of Dr. Muhammad Yunus, has diminished India's regional influence by broadening the country's foreign policy outreach and bolstering ties with China and Pakistan. His visit to China in March 2025, was the first state visit of Dr. Yunus, underscoring a significant reorientation in Bangladesh's regional policy approach. During this visit, he pitched Bangladesh as the “guardian of the sea” and an opportunity for China to expand its economic relations in the region. He also held that the northeastern Indian states are landlocked, implying that China could use Bangladesh to reach these states for trade.

These remarks had strategic underpinnings. China welcomed the Bangladeshi Chief Advisor with enthusiasm by signing multiple agreements and MoUs and pledging an investment worth more than \$1 billion. China committed to providing \$2.1 billion in total in terms of investment, grants, and loans. An agreement on economic and technological cooperation was signed between the two sides during this visit. Moreover, eight MoUs were signed covering numerous sectors including sports, health, media collaboration, infrastructure, data-sharing, military cooperation, and cultural exchanges. This cooperation serves the interests of both sides as China seeks to expand its economic and diplomatic outreach. While, Bangladesh needs political, and economic stability to strengthen its military, trade, and infrastructure.

Many experts believe the incumbent Bangladeshi government's regional policy outlook will compromise the country's traditional neutral posture. However, a closer look at Dhaka's new policy shift illustrates that the country only seeks to expand its allies and avoid overreliance on any single regional power. Beijing's policy of non-interference in domestic issues of allies has poised it as an attractive and reliable ally for transitional governments and countries seeking economic and political stability.

### **The Road Ahead for India and Bangladesh**

However, Bangladesh would have to face several key challenges due to this novel transition in regional policy. Dhaka's growing closeness with India's regional rivals has sparked serious strategic and diplomatic concerns in New Delhi. Bangladesh's strategic shift threatens to undermine India's Act East policy and complicates its efforts to counter China's expanding influence in South Asia and beyond.

New Delhi suffers from a negative perception amongst Bengali citizens due to several bilateral issues and its close ties with the Hasina Wajid government. Frequent border clashes and unresolved water distribution issues have also exacerbated the bilateral relations between the two sides. India's recent visa restrictions for Bengali citizens have further intensified India-Bangladesh relations. Moreover, the Indian government has also ceased the trans-shipment facilities of goods and cargo from its territory to Bangladesh, in an apparent response to Dr. Yunus's controversial remarks about the northeastern states of the country. Bangladeshi government and officials have repeatedly warned that these travel restrictions are detrimental to the long-standing ties between the two countries.

To restore its influence over Bangladesh, India must take prudent measures. It must portray its image as a constructive, inclusive, and respectful regional power. Moreover, India must stop seeing Bangladesh merely as a component of its strategic depth. **New Delhi is required to pursue a positive diplomatic approach towards Dhaka to keep it in its political gambit.** Moreover, pending bilateral issues also need to be resolved urgently. Similarly, Bangladesh must act cautiously in pursuit of extended diplomatic and strategic alliances as well. It should maintain its neutrality while pursuing the ambition of being a significant regional player. However, offending its western neighbor can increase complications for Bangladesh, which will be detrimental to its geopolitical and strategic pursuits.

Abbas Hashemite, April 23, 2025

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